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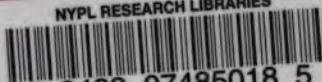
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THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER.



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THE SNARE OF
THE FOWLER

Hector, Annie (French)
BY

MRS. ALEXANDER

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "WHICH SHALL IT BE?"
ETC., ETC.

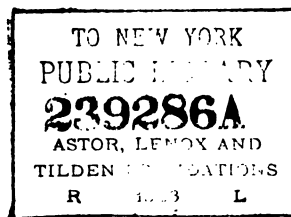


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THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER.

CHAPTER I.

MATTERS OF BUSINESS.

AMONG the passengers who alighted at Earl's Court from a Mansion House train one fine warm afternoon in July, was a short, dapper, wiry man, of uncertain age. He was exceedingly fresh and spruce in his attire, with light hay-colored hair, whiskers a shade or two darker, and green-gray twinkling eyes. He carried a tightly rolled umbrella in one hand and in the other a professional-looking black bag, new and shiny. His air and bearing were almost offensively prosperous and self-satisfied.

He ran actively upstairs, apologized effusively to a lady with whom he had almost come into collision, and leaving the station took the first turning on the right, which is that well known and highly respectable street, Melford Road, which debouches on the older thoroughfare called Salisbury Avenue.

The houses were of the correct "Queen Anne" pattern in red brick, with bay windows, balconies, porches, and pediments, but on a diminished scale; a quiet, orderly street, where the curtains usually looked fresh and the brasses were conscientiously polished. Yet not a street suggestive of wealth or luxury, rather of genteel independence and severe self-respect.

With a certain air of familiarity the spruce wayfarer walked straight to the door of a house half way down on the left side and rang.

The door was promptly opened by a grave-looking servant in black, with a beautiful white apron and cap, the latter decorated with black ribbons.

"Can I see Mrs. Dallas?" asked the visitor.

"Yes sir, this way, sir," and she preceded him upstairs, past a small, well kept conservatory, to a door draped with some "greenery yellowy" art stuff, opening which, she ushered him into a pretty comfortable drawing room, saying in a subdued tone, "Mr. Deedes, if you please, 'm."

A lady who was sitting at a writing table in the usual smaller back room rose and came forward to meet him—a tall lady, with a remarkably graceful, though rather full, figure. She was dark—very dark and pale; but her lips were red—redder than seemed quite natural. She was carefully dressed in fresh widow's weeds, and her thick black hair showed in strong contrast to the soft snowy whiteness of her cap.

"You are very good to come so early," she said with a smile, while her great lustrous dark eyes looked kindly on him. As she held out her hand—a very small hand, but darker than her face, and glittering with gems—she spoke low, with some deliberation, and her voice sounded slightly guttural: "I know you are a very busy man."

"Your affairs are my business at present," said Mr. Deedes, in a friendly, but a respectful tone. "I have brought the papers you wished to see." He laid his bag on a small ottoman, and took the chair to which she pointed. "I trust you feel more composed—more yourself?"

"Thank you! I find work my best help—and I have much to do."

"Just so; yet you are spared much trouble and vexation by your late husband's action in settling his property on you during his lifetime. It has also saved you a considerable sum."

The lady sighed.

"He was always so infinitely thoughtful for me in every way—too thoughtful. The present is unspeakably desolate now that his helping hand is withdrawn from me forever." She paused abruptly, as though striving to control her feelings.

Mr. Deedes preserved a sympathetic silence, and seemed to study the pattern of the carpet with much attention.

"I must not waste your time, my dear sir," she resumed, in a firmer voice. "I have asked you for this information, as I must know how I stand exactly before I make any

plans; and I confess I feel anxious for change of air and scene."

"Very naturally! I do not think there is much unknown to you in Colonel Dallas's affairs. That sum of five thousand three hundred, which you very wisely induced him to invest in Indian railway shares, is now worth three-eighths per cent. more than he bought in. I have brought you a list of securities and some notes as to the mortgage."

He proceeded to unlock his bag and produce sundry documents which he and his client discussed for the next quarter of an hour with a degree of comprehension on the lady's part that, if possible, increased the respectful admiration with which her legal adviser regarded her. He had begun to return some of the papers to their receptacle, and lay aside others to be retained by Mrs. Dallas, when she rose and rang the bell.

"I am forgetting that you must sorely need a cup of tea," she said, with her grave, soft smile. "How selfish sorrow and preoccupation make one! Tea at once," she added, when the servant appeared. "It is indeed fortunate that my dear husband's care spared me the cost of proving his will and of succession duty. As it is, I shall have a greatly diminished income—his half-pay and pension are very inadequately replaced by the small amount left to me. Do not imagine I complain; my tastes and habits are simple enough, but I feel anxious to push my son's fortunes. You know he failed, through ill-health, to pass for the Indian Civil Service, and I succeeded in getting him into Messrs. Overton & Colville's house—they are connections of his father, my first husband. He seems to be doing well, but he *has* cost me money. However, I thank Heaven this tie is left to me."

She rose and went to a small tea-table near the bay window, through which came the scent of flowers. The tea was daintily served, though the equipage was inexpensive, save for a pretty old-fashioned silver teapot; but the tea itself was fragrant and of the best; the thin brown bread and butter were fresh, and the biscuits delicate and crisp. Mr. Deedes was evidently quite alive to the merits of afternoon tea, and for a few minutes there was silence, while the fair widow's guest imbibed the cheering cup.

"You were, I think, somewhat uneasy respecting that

five thousand," he resumed. "But it is quite safe. It is included in the deed of gift which the colonel executed little more than a year ago. I suppose the late Mr. Frederic Dallas left little or no property?"

Mrs. Dallas shook her head. "A mere trifle—the remains of his capital, on which he had been living for some years," she replied. "He was indeed a rolling stone, poor fellow! I never saw him, but my husband was greatly attached to him, though they rarely met after their boyish days. It is from a desire to carry out his wishes that I have, perhaps imprudently, undertaken the supervision and partial support of Mr. Frederic Hastings's daughter."

"His daughter? I thought he died unmarried?"

"He did, I am very sorry to say, which makes the case a peculiarly hard one. Colonel Dallas, when he retired and left India to join me in London, traveled from Brindisi to Munich, where his brother had resided for some time. My husband found him dying of fever, too far gone to speak, but I believe he made some gesture as if he would commit this girl to his brother's care. So Colonel Dallas, who was most generous and impulsive, brought her to me. I confess I thought it extremely imprudent, and I persuaded him to place her at school. She was only fifteen, terribly untrained and altogether difficult to manage. I have impressed upon her the necessity of fitting herself to earn her own bread."

"Of course, of course, poor young thing!" ejaculated Deedes. "It is a painful position."

"Exceedingly painful," returned Mrs. Dallas. "Justly or unjustly, there is a prejudice against persons so situated, and this girl's conduct is not calculated to remove it. She is headstrong, and somewhat inclined to coquetry; indeed, I do not care to have her in the house with my son! it might be well to tell her the truth about herself, but Colonel Dallas was always averse to letting her know. In fact he was perhaps weakly tender toward her; but I hardly like to go against his wishes now he is gone."

"It would do no good to destroy her respect for her parents," said the lawyer gravely. "Such knowledge might harden as well as mortify her."

"It is impossible to say," returned Mrs. Dallas coldly, and paused; then with a change of tone she resumed, "I have not found the papers you thought might be among

my late husband's, but I have not looked through half of them yet; there are some of his brother's also, and the leases may be among them. The property is of little value, you say?"

"Little or none; merely a couple of tumble-down houses in a country town, but as these are the only part of his estate not included in the deed of gift to yourself, why we must hand them over to Captain Forrester, his next of kin."

"He is but a second or third cousin," said the widow in a regretful tone.

"Even so; Colonel Dallas had no nearer relative; the family has dwindled sadly of late years."

"I imagine it must have almost died out with my husband," she said thoughtfully. "Take another cup of tea, Mr. Deedes?"

"Thank you! I really must exceed my usual allowance. it is too good."

After some further talk respecting investments and affairs generally, the lawyer rose to take leave, when a young man entered somewhat abruptly, exclaiming "Mother!" Then seeing Deedes he paused, and added, "I did not know you were engaged!" "Good-day, Mr. Ashby," said the lawyer. "I need not trouble Mrs. Dallas any longer; I was just wishing her good-morning."

"You must not let me shorten your visit," returned Ashby, politely offering his hand.

He was like his mother, though darker and less good looking. His eyes especially resembled hers, save that they were sleepy-looking and more watchful. He was scarcely above middle height, slender and gracefully made, but decidedly un-English in aspect; a very slight yet black mustache marked his upper lip, and an almost constant caressing half smile showed a range of dazzlingly white teeth. He looked like a mother's darling, and Mrs. Dallas's great dark eyes softened as they rested on him.

"I met Myra as I came up from the train," he said, addressing her. She was coming here. Will you see her?"

Mrs. Dallas hesitated half a moment, and then said:

"Yes, tell her to come up."

Young Ashby turned and left the room, and his mother said quickly, in a low voice :

"This is the girl we spoke of! You will understand my objections when you see her."

She had hardly uttered the words, when her son returned, and held the door open to permit a young lady in rather rusty black to walk in.

She was tall and slight, with a white face, and eyes of rare, real, dark blue—very sad, nearly tearful eyes. A lot of nut-brown hair was turned back from her face, and not too tidily twisted in a roll, which showed below her shabby black straw hat, with its bows and ends of dusty black ribbon. Her skin was delicately, but not pinkly fair, and though her nose was of the *retroussé* order, it seemed more pathetic than saucy; an expressive mouth, not very small, was trying to smile, and succeeding tremulously, as she approached Mrs. Dallas, who rose and held out her hand.

"Well, Myra!" she said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Myra, catching the hand in both her own, "I am so awfully sorry for you. Such a terrible loss as yours must break your heart. Why—why—would you not let me see him once, only once before he died. He was my best, my only friend."

"Do not excite yourself," said Mrs. Dallas gently. "The colonel deserved your deepest gratitude, and if you prove it by following my advice, you will find a friend in me."

Myra let go her hand, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, wept silently for a minute or two, while Mr. Deedes, looking on with a keen sense of discomfort, thought that Mrs. Dallas's fear of this interesting, impulsive girl was not unfounded.

"I must wish you good-morning," he said hurriedly. "You will let me know when you have completed your search, or should you wish to see me before?"

"Thank you, my dear sir! I can never forget your ever-ready kindness."

"Shrewd, sensible woman! and deuced handsome," was the little lawyer's reflection as he left the house. "Shouldn't wonder if she found another husband; sorry for that poor child, but I dare say the aunt—no, not her aunt—her father's sister-in-law—will be a kind, judicious friend to her."

"I don't want *him* listening and prying here," thought his client. "Take some tea, Myra," she said aloud, in a

civil tone. "Try not to give way to grief; self-control is a great power to all, but to those who have their bread to win, it is absolutely essential."

"I am sure I know that!" returned Myra. "And I believe I am better than I used to be, but when I think that I shall never, never see Uncle Edward again, or hear his voice, I can't keep back the tears; I could scream out!"

"Pray do not," said Mrs. Dallas, "or people will think I have a private lunatic asylum;" and she looked rather sternly at her husband's niece. "People have been shut up for such unbridled emotion before this. *My* loss is greater than yours, and I do not cry or scream."

"Ah! you have your son, I have no one;" said Myra, trying to control herself.

"I wish my mother's son could console you, Myra," said Ashby, with a long look at the weeping girl. "Do dry your eyes, and take some tea or a glass of wine!"

Myra was silent for another moment, evidently struggling to compose herself; then she said wearily :

"No, thank you, I do not want anything."

"Why did you want to see me, then, Myra?" asked Mrs. Dallas.

"I had waited so long thinking you would send for me, I grew afraid you would never see me again, and though I know you do not like me, I do not want to be thrown off and—and disowned; then Mrs. Fairchild constantly asks me what I am going to do, and I do not know what to say!"

"I dare say," replied Mrs. Dallas thoughtfully. "No one likes to be burdened with a girl—a helpless girl. What do you think of doing yourself, Myra?"

"I—I don't know. Have I no money at all, aunt?"

Mrs. Dallas shook her head sadly.

"But," urged Myra, "my father had some? We were not rich, but we had a servant, and everyone was paid somehow!"

"Your father was an artist and, I suppose, sold his pictures."

"Very few of them, and latterly he painted very little. He was so unwell for a long time," replied Myra.

"Then I fear he must have spent his capital; at any rate, you may be sure your uncle did not rob you. For his sake,

Myra, I am going to make you an allowance,—something to help you to work for yourself,—for you cannot expect me to support you altogether.”

“No, certainly not. I wish I could do without any help from you. I may later. What can I do? I hate teaching; and I know nothing well enough—I would rather be a servant!”

“Nonsense, Myra! You have had great advantages: you speak German, Italian, and, I believe, you draw, you play——”

“I do *nothing* well,” ejaculated Myra, with a desponding gesture.

“More shame for you, then. I hope you are not lazy! However, I shall have a consultation with Mrs. Fairchild, who is very friendly to you, as soon as I see what allowance I can make you; and you must remember you are no relation of mine, and you have no claim upon me.”

“I know that very well;” said Myra, with increasing composure; “it is an act of charity on your part to give me anything, but I thought, I *did* think, my dear good uncle would have remembered me—would have——”

She stopped abruptly, struggling to keep back her tears. Ashby shifted his seat nearer to her and whispered in her ear.

“Well, Myra, I assure you I did not influence him against you,” said Mrs. Dallas with cold composure.

“I do not say you did. I do not suppose you did,” said Myra. “I dare say he did not think of me. Why should he? After all, I had no real claim upon him, but I told you I only came to ask you what I ought to say to Mrs. Fairchild. This morning she told me she had great difficulty in finding a German governess, and if I would undertake the class for two or three months, she would give me five pounds a quarter.”

“That is a fair offer,” replied Mrs. Dallas. “What did you say in reply?”

“I said I would ask you. I could teach German pretty well, and then I might paint a little.”

“You had better ask Mrs. Fairchild to call on me tomorrow afternoon, if she can, and we will arrange something, at all events for the present.”

“I will, aunt; but she is busy; she is going to Ramsgate next week. Still I know she wants to see you.”

There was a moment's silence; then with heightened color Myra turned to Ashby and said abruptly:

"I wish you would go away, Lionel! I want to speak to—to your mother."

"Very well," said the young man, rising slowly. "But you need not mind me."

As soon as the door closed behind him Myra drew her chair nearer to Mrs. Dallas, and looking earnestly at her, as if seeking for sympathy, she said hesitatingly:

"I am so sorry to trouble you, but—but *this* is my only dress, and all the money I possess is tenpence-halfpenny."

"I do not imagine you are a good manager," returned Mrs. Dallas, knitting her brows. "However, I am willing to give you some money on account of the allowance I shall make you; but pray be prudent."

She rose and took a notebook out of the drawer of her writing table, from which she extracted a new clean five-pound note. "There, Myra, make that go as far as you can. I would close with Mrs. Fairchild's offer, and I may as well say that you may count on five pounds a quarter from *me*, so long as you conduct yourself to my satisfaction."

Myra looked at her with surprise.

"I did not think you would have been so generous to me, aunt!" she exclaimed. "I wished you liked me better, so that I might feel more warmly grateful to you; but I am obliged, very much obliged. One day I may earn enough to maintain myself, then I should be glad to relieve you, aunt."

"I wish to be just, Myra, and I hope that gratitude to me will induce you to discourage my son's foolish fancy for you, which you know annoys me. It is but a passing whim, but——"

"I always *do* discourage him," interrupted Myra somewhat vehemently. "I do not want his whims or his fancies, and I have no fancy for him, as you know very well, aunt."

"I know nothing about what you feel or pretend to feel," said Mrs. Dallas, with an angry flash from her big black eyes. "But I beg you will not call me 'aunt'; now that your uncle is no more, there is no connection between us."

"I shall not forget, Mrs. Dallas," returned Myra, the tears gathering in her eyes. "I will not intrude any longer upon you."

"Stay, Myra, you must give me an acknowledgment for that five pounds. Now you must expect no more for three months."

She traced a few lines and gave Myra the pen to sign them.

Then that young lady drew on her much-mended glove, and looking straight into the black eyes so sternly bent upon her, said:

"I will not offer you my hand, for I do not think you would like to take it. But I *am* thankful that for my dear uncle's sake you are generous to me. Good-by." She was gone before Mrs. Dallas could reply.

"That girl is a puzzle to me," she thought, her eyes still fastened on the door by which she had disappeared.

"Is she stupidly proud and distrustful? or is she stupid only? I never could make her out. As to her indifference to Lionel, that is rank affectation, probably to conceal some design upon the foolish boy. It is amazing that any man can care for such a colorless piece of unformed femininity, and yet, how fond the colonel would have been of her. Well, it is a costly experiment, but I have done well in stopping her mouth. She will not trouble me much more."

She returned to her seat by the tea table, and sat for some minutes in deep thought.

Meanwhile Myra descended the stairs slowly, and was passing through the hall when the dining room door opened, and Lionel Ashby came out to interrupt her progress.

"I cannot let you go back alone, Myra, though you will not deign to give me your confidence!"

"Oh! no, no, Lionel! You must not come with me, I really do not want you. I am accustomed to go about alone, and it is quite unnecessary to make any fuss about me."

"No matter! If you do not want me, I want you, Myra. You shall not treat me with such coldness and contempt," he added, his dark cheek flashing.

"You are silly and provoking! I cannot let you come—you will only vex your mother and—let me pass, Lionel!"

"Yes, you may pass," he said, stepping aside, "but I will go with you to St. John's Wood."

He took his hat from its peg, and followed her down the steps.

"You only annoy me, Lionel," she exclaimed, as he walked beside her. "And I am not going to St. John's Wood!"

"Then where on earth *are* you going?" in a tone of great surprise.

"To my friend, Mrs. Keene."

"What! To that inn-keeping woman! I can't say you have very refined taste, Myra; and you know my mother does not like you to go to these low people."

"I cannot help that! Your mother has just told me I am not to consider myself her niece any longer, which has vexed me because she was treating me generously at the same time; but Mrs. Keene is perfectly respectable, and her house is a private hotel. I only go to her own room, and see no one but herself and her granddaughter. She is the only friend I have, and I am not going to give her up to please you or your mother. I wish you would go back. Mrs. Dallas will be so annoyed—not more than I am."

"Why are you so unkind, so hard, Myra? Why will you not love me? Other girls are ready enough to listen to me. Why are you so proud and disdainful?"

"I am not disdainful! I just do not like you—that is, in the way you want—and I never shall. You are too conceited. You had better put me out of your thoughts, and amuse yourself with the girls who *do* appreciate you."

"It is no question of amusing myself, Myra. It is something too deep for that! I wonder," he went on, a fierce light coming into his eyes, "I wonder you are not afraid of treating me so scornfully."

"Oh, nonsense! You don't carry a poniard, do you?" showing a row of small pearly teeth as she laughed good-humoredly.

"You drive me mad! And I so seldom have a chance of speaking to you."

"I wish you would go back! There—there is my omnibus. What is the use of sitting in a disagreeable, crowded omnibus, where you cannot speak a word to me; besides, I think there is only room for one more; there it has stopped, good-by. Don't be cross—I do not want to vex you!"

A smile, a quick wave of the hand, and she vanished into the capacious vehicle.

Lionel Ashby stood for a moment looking after it with a curious, angry, longing glance. While the small brown hand with its dark nails which hung by his side clenched itself tightly, and he murmured something—not exactly a blessing—then he turned and walked sharply back to his mother's house.

Entering with a latch-key he met the servant carrying down the tea things, and found Mrs. Dallas still sitting in deep thought in the window.

She looked up as he entered.

"You foolish boy!" she said, with a frown. "You have taken the trouble of escorting Myra to the train, or the omnibus, and you know how these attentions annoy me. I would rather follow you to your grave than see you committed to marriage with Myra. She is no match for you or for any gentleman!"

"Well, my dear mother, at present she is the only woman—the only girl—who could induce me to think of marriage, and that is probably because she does not want me. No match for me! *She*, I assure you, does not consider me a match for her."

"Her insolence is intolerable. I trust you will see no more of her. I am going to give her a handsome allowance out of my husband's money, and wash my hands of her."

"An allowance!" repeated the young man with immense surprise. "Why, what—what, for Heaven's sake, induces you to do such a thing? It is not like you."

"Because I think it right. Because I have good reasons, you may be sure."

"I should think you had," he ejaculated, "though I am pretty sure you will not tell me."

"Not now, Lionel; but if you are guided by me and give her up,—if you will turn your thoughts and fancies elsewhere,—I will take you into my confidence and show you all my plans; and I have great ambitions for you, my son."

"That is more than I have. I only want to be rich and comfortable, and have Myra all to myself."

Mrs. Dallas made a gesture of disgust and contempt.

"What?" she asked, "a creature that treats you with coldness and disdain!"

The young man laughed—not a pleasant laugh.

"That's what gives a sort of zest to it. I should like to have her in spite of all—if it is all real, which I doubt."

"So do I," echoed his mother dreamily; and then silence fell upon them. Mrs. Dallas's thoughts were evidently far away.

Lionel yawned slightly, and rolled himself a cigarette, then he stretched out his hand to take a weekly society paper which lay on the sofa near him. For a minute or two he glanced carelessly at it, and then asked in his usual gentle tone :

"Isn't this the relative I have heard the colonel talk of?" And he read aloud: "'The late George Dallas, Esq., of Harley Street and Crown Court, E.C., is reported to have died intestate. Had Colonel Dallas survived his relative he would, therefore, have been heir to the elder gentleman's wealth, which is considerable; unfortunately that gallant and distinguished officer predeceased his uncle by a week.'"

"What!" cried Mrs. Dallas, starting to her feet, her eyes blazing with excitement. "That man dead without a will, only a week after my husband; and all his wealth is consequently lost to *me*—to you! My God! it is too cruel, too bitter a disappointment! Now it all goes to a distant cousin—an overbearing, empty-headed fellow; you must remember his dining here nearly two years ago, Cecil Forrester? What spell of ill-luck is on me!"

She snatched the paper from her son, read the announcement eagerly, then crushing it in her hands, flung it from her with vehement despair.

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

It was an awful blow. For years the chance of possessing old George Dallas's wealth was the dream of her life, and to miss it by a week! Had Mrs. Dallas known that fate had entered both in the race for death, she would have fought the King of Terrors even more desperately than she did, and she had done her best! For on her husband hung all her plans, all her ambition, though he had not proved the lever she had expected.

When the beautiful, pensive window of Dan Ashby—a commissariat officer said to be rather too fond of “sampling” the rum and brandy provided for the division to which he was attached—came to consult Colonel Dallas respecting her husband's affairs, and to ask some small concession for her son, her heart swelled within her as she noticed his increasing tenderness of manner, his lingering looks his devotion to her interests.

The daughter of an indigo planter and his native wife, she had been sent to England for her education, and returned to India with a strong determination to marry none but an English officer, thereby, as she thought, securing the first step on the ladder leading up to social distinction. She found, however, that poor Dan Ashby was but a broken reed as regarded her purposes, while his death left her in poor circumstances and social insignificance.

Now Colonel Dallas was a well known man in India, a distinguished officer, a man of good family, well bred, and not so very much older than herself. Here she had found the right thing at last, and after some judicious angling she landed her prize. They had not been married more than two or three years when Colonel Dallas met with a bad accident out riding, which was followed by a severe illness and he was invalided home with small chance of ever again going on active service.

Established in London with moderate, though comfortable means, Mrs. Dallas soon found that she and her husband were lost in the crowd from which they had not sufficient fortune to be distinguished. Colonel Dallas's family connections were not numerous, and lived chiefly at their country places. So her restless desire to be accepted in society—fashionable society—remained unsatisfied. She was a persevering woman, however, and kept a fair face. She devoted herself to the care of her husband and to religion of the High Church order, and was slowly creeping into a circle of aristocratic dowagers and spinsters, when Colonel Dallas died just a week too soon.

She had often heard of her husband's aged relative, and sighed with almost sickening desire for the wealth he could confer by a stroke of his pen. She scarcely dared to hope for any portion of it, for the old gentleman kept all relations at arm's length; and now when that which might have fulfilled her most ardent wishes—his decease intestate—had occurred, unkind Death had stepped in to rob her of the riches she pined for. She had gained an immense ascendancy over her husband by the exercise of strong self-control, and the careful modeling of her conduct on the lines he approved of, so that Colonel Dallas had no hesitation in leaving his brother's daughter and her affairs in his wife's hands.

It was some time before Mrs. Dallas could master her emotion. She paced up and down, clasping and unclasping her hands, murmuring unintelligible syllables to herself, and seemingly forgetful of her son's presence. At length he exclaimed:

"It is no use your tearing yourself in this way, mother; the money is gone—you will never get it back; so try not to think about it. Even if you poisoned this man Forrester, who seems to have got the cash, it would not come to us. We might cultivate the young fellow; but I fancy he is not the sort of man I should get on with. By the way, when do you think of going out of town?"

"I do not know! For the moment I can think of nothing but this awful disappointment. I have still an immense quantity of papers to sort and examine—heaps to destroy. I cannot think of going anywhere."

"Well, I find I am to have my holiday next week, but of course, if you want me——"

"No, I do not want you in the least! Go by all means. Where do you think of going?"

"I am not sure. Two of my chums want me to join them in an expedition to Dieppe."

"Dieppe! You will spend a heap of money. I cannot afford it."

"No, I don't suppose I shall. Brown and Dobbs, the men I think of joining, are very prudent fellows, and I only get a fortnight."

"I suppose you have put by something for this trip?"

"Well, no; I have a miserable salary, as you know, but when old Overton told me I might have from the second to the twentieth of August, he gave me a fi'pun note, and said I had not done badly! These lordly Englishmen are terrible thick heads at arithmetic, and waste their money awfully without having much to show!"

"If I give you five pounds more, will it do?"

"No, my dear mother, certainly not. Make it fifteen. You can do it easily!"

"No, Lionel! I cannot do it easily. I will give you ten, and if you are run aground a couple more, but not unless you are very hard up. I expect you to make the ten do."

"Well, I'll try!" then after a pause he resumed, "So you are going to make Myra an allowance? What put that into your head?"

"Regard for my own reputation! As the girl was known to be adopted by my husband in a way, I could not send her adrift unprovided for. Now I need not be troubled with her any more; she will marry some writing-master or traveler, and keep out of my way. I never could bear her, she is so hopelessly without tact; you can never tell when she may break into your squares and scatter your reserves; there is a sort of barbarous indifference about her that enrages me! It is hard to hurt her."

"Yet she is what's called sensitive!" observed Lionel, rising as he spoke. "You never could understand Myra. I don't think I can, either, but that does not matter much. I think I'll take a stroll round to the tennis ground."

"It is scarcely seemly to show yourself in public so soon!"

"Oh! I shan't play—not such a fool! but I can sit and smoke and talk to anyone I know, though I don't suppose I'll find anyone there—every soul is away."

"Be sure you are not late for dinner—7.30."

"All right," said the youth, and having lit his cigarette he sauntered out of the room.

Meanwhile, Myra Dallas carried a heavy heart with her on her not too-rapid progress toward her only friend's abode. She was in that stage of existence when a certain amount of worldly knowledge begins to force itself on the understanding, and instinctively the soft hands of inexperienced girlhood grope half-blindly for friendship, for support, and at this period of awakening her one stay was taken from her.

On Uncle Edward she had leaned as on a tower of strength. He had always been kind to her; there was something pitying in his kindness—he always seemed sorry for her.

This produced a depressing effect. It made her feel there was some sad circumstance in her life that entitled her to constant compassion. Her strong sympathy with him enabled her to bear up against the ill-concealed enmity of his wife, and even to assist her in hiding it, for Myra soon felt the difference of Mrs. Dallas's voice and manner before the colonel, and when he was not present. She knew it would vex him to perceive the tacit dislike which Myra felt so keenly, so she kept up a friendly aspect and held her tongue.

That her uncle was vaguely aware his wife and niece did not draw to each others he began to see. For her last birthday—an anniversary rarely noticed—he had, in his wife's absence, given her a diamond and sapphire ring roughly set in soft gold, with which she was highly pleased, and immediately showed to Mrs. Dallas. That lady dropped her darkly fringed eyes and said amiably that the stones were good, that the colonel also was very good, but as the mounting was quite barbaric she would have it properly set if Myra would give it to her, to which Myra replied that she preferred the ring just as it was.

It was a cruel change for her to a London school after having had the run of her father's studio, and the com-

mand of his diminutive *ménage*, where their only servant, a kindly old German who adored her and treated her as her own child, was cook and housekeeper; and where the artists, her father's friends, who came to talk and smoke with him, treated her with affectionate politeness, and even deigned to discuss books and music with the frank, outspoken child, as she was then. To be suddenly transported to a stiff middle-class school, where her ways were considered lamentably unsettled and untidy, and her general information, which though rather beyond the average, was quite useless for examination purposes, was indeed a trial. At first the sense of strangeness and isolation was intolerable; she almost fretted herself to death, and was only saved from utter despair by the friendship of the German governess, who quickly developed a "schwarmerei" for her.

Time, however, levels all things. Gradually poor Myra hardened into something like indifference, and found friends among her schoolmates, though she never became a general favorite, nor did she ever take a high place in her class. She had a good idea of historical periods, but she could not remember dates, nor could she produce precise pigeon-holed bits of information, though she had a clear bird's-eye view of many things.

Still the days grew more endurable as the time went on, and as her mind matured, occasional vague doubts as to what was to become of her presented themselves. At nineteen, however, the future does not seem terrible; good must lurk behind the golden mist that enwraps it, and the unknown may hold heights of joy, as well as depths of sorrow.

Of late her visits to Melford Road were fewer and farther between. The presence of Lionel Ashby introduced an element of discomfort, and something indefinable had come between her Uncle Edward and herself. His failing health threw him more and more into his wife's hands, and at length the icy grasp of death closed the scene.

The second day after the conversation above recorded was dull and sultry, and evening was drawing in. Rugby Lodge, Vale Terrace, St. John's Wood, Mrs. Fairchild's establishment for young ladies, was in a very desolate con-

dition. The "breaking-up" festivities were over, and the last pupils had departed that morning. Ends of cord, torn paper, morsels of straw, were freely scattered about. Bolsters, pillows, and folded blankets lay in the middle of the deserted beds. The chalk marks were unobliterated on the big black board in the schoolroom, and Whiteley's men had already removed the drawing room curtains. Myra had passed a miserable, unemployed day. She had nothing to do and nowhere to go. Mrs. Fairchild, who had been breathlessly busy all the morning, had told her as she was going out that she intended calling on Mrs. Dallas, to ascertain her wishes and intentions.

"I hope she will not want to leave you here, Myra," she said, as she put on her gloves in the hall. "It would be most inconvenient. I want to have a regular clean up. It was not properly done last year; however, we shall see;" with which vague remark she departed.

The slow hours had dragged through. Myra had regulated the books in the schoolroom, and tried to finish a piece of fancy work left to her by one of the departing pupils, an occupation in which she was no proficient, and dropped after a while, to sit musing over her past happy days in the years which seemed so far away back. She vaguely heard the house bell, and after a considerable time a very dusty housemaid came to inform her that tea was ready.

In Mrs. Fairchild's private room Myra found that lady in a comfortable morning gown, seated at tea, the table being spread with some more solid comestibles than bread and butter.

"Come, Myra, let us have something to eat before we talk. I am thoroughly exhausted, and I must get off to-morrow, for I shall only have a short rest, as there are lots of things to be seen to. You are looking rather dazed; a cup of tea will rouse you."

A period of silence ensued, during which Mrs. Fairchild applied herself vigorously to supply the waste of the last six or seven hours; while Myra, depressed and anxious to know what was to become of her, pretended to occupy herself with a slice of bread and butter.

"Another cup of tea, Myra? Then ring the bell and we will send away the things. I feel greatly refreshed. Such a day as I have had! I was quite two hours in Westbourne

Grove, and then I had to go all the way over to Melford Road."

A pause while the tray was removed and the gas lit; then when the door was finally closed she resumed:

"Well, Myra, I had a long talk with Mrs. Dallas, and I must say a more charming, right-minded woman I have never met; I am afraid you have given her a good of trouble! Not that she complained, you know, but one could see it."

"I never gave her any trouble that I know of," said Myra dejectedly. "As far as I can make out my chief fault is being in the world at all. I seem in everybody's way. Would it oblige Mrs. Dallas if I were to jump into the Serpentine?"

"That is a most unbecoming and irreligious speech, Myra, and shows how little the precept and example set before you in this house have sunk into your mind. However, I really haven't time to dwell upon these serious topics. I had a long conversation with your aunt, in which she showed a true interest in you, and explained your circumstances to me. I am therefore willing that you should remain here during the holidays, and fill the place of German teacher until I can find a really suitable person. You can have the small back room on the top floor, and take your meals in the study next the kitchen—I mean the garden. I must leave cook,—she is old, but she can be trusted,—as Jane is leaving, and as I take Lizzy with me, it is perhaps better cook should not be quite alone. Can you mend linen neatly? It would be rather a nice occupation to look through the linen closet and put it all in order. At any rate, do the best you can; the rest and quiet will do you good, and you can write to me every week, and send me the amount of the tradesmen's books, which I trust to your keeping down as much as possible. Now, Myra, I hope you see that I am stretching a point. There is scarcely anyone else in the world would do as much for you!"

"Ah, yes; you are right; now that Uncle Edward is gone."

"Well, I hope you will prove grateful, and help me as much as you can. I am a little uneasy about next quarter; the two Dixons are leaving, and Clara Dillon, and I am not sure little Carry James will return. These are dread-

ful gaps. I must fill them up somehow. Mrs. Dallas is extremely kind in offering to recommend my school. Not that I want any of her aristocratic friends—those sort of people are more costly than remunerative! No; I shall just stick to the well to do middle class."

Myra gazed at her as though she hardly understood her words. "Yes, you are very good," she murmured.

"I suppose you have nothing else to propose?" said Mrs. Fairchild sharply.

"Me! No; of course not. I have no one to go to, and—and I will do what you want as well as I can; but my darning is no great thing. I used to watch poor dear old Hedwig mending things, but I never did much myself."

"Then the present is a great opportunity for you to improve yourself. And now, Myra, I shall go to my room, as I have some writing to do. Get to bed soon, for I shall want you to help me in my packing to-morrow morning, and to take directions; so good-night. I hope that you will study to win Mrs. Dallas's regard. I am afraid you have not been as mindful of her opinion as you ought."

"I am sure I don't know. I never heard her express any opinion."

"Ah, Myra! that is the speech of an unchastened and perverse spirit. There, you had better go to bed, and pray to God to give you a meek spirit and a contrite heart. I wish you would tell cook as you pass the kitchen-stair that I shall breakfast at half-past eight, and I should like a bloater and some buttered toast."

Though Myra was by no means attached to Mrs. Fairchild, she did not dislike her. She was a woman with a cool head, a tranquil temper, and a keen sense of her own interest.

When first Myra was placed with her she had the prestige of being the niece of Colonel Dallas, and a favorite niece into the bargain, so her sins of untidiness and irregularity were tolerated, and gradually dismissed. After a while her familiarity with foreign languages made her of use conversationally, and Mrs. Fairchild grew more friendly, though she began to perceive clearly that Myra was a mere dependent on her uncle's bounty.

It was not, however, till this day that she was aware of the poor girl's sad position. The shrewd little woman

(she had a small, neat figure, prematurely white hair, and sharp, twinkling, dark brown eyes) had too much sense to be unnecessarily cruel, and she advised Mrs. Dallas to leave Myra in ignorance of the stain upon her birth, for though far from sensitive herself, she felt instinctively what a paralyzing effect the knowledge of this misfortune would have upon such a nature.

The possibility of filling up the post of German governess so cheaply charmed Mrs. Fairchild; for Myra was if anything more familiar with German than with English, nor was she a bad teacher, though by no means fond of teaching.

It was with real regret and moist eyes that Myra bid the active little schoolmistress good-by for five long weeks. They spread out an appalling vista of loneliness before her, for Myra was a sociable soul. After all, Mrs. Fairchild was far better than no one, and though her early foreign training did not suggest the complete barrier which exists between ladies and servants in England, the cook, who was left in charge of her and of the house, did not suggest companionship.

The last directions were screamed from the departing cab, and Myra turned back to the house sadly enough, with a curious, unsettled feeling of being unable to begin anything. Mrs. Fairchild had had an early luncheon or dinner, and a long afternoon awaited her.

"I'm sure, miss, it will be terrible dull for you," said cook, an elderly woman, short and extremely stout, with a masterful nose, and a taste for fine language. "Suppose you just go and take a nice walk while I put the little study straight, and then you'll be inclined to partake of tea when you come in, and don't trouble to begin any needlework till to-morrow. Mrs. Fairchild she 'ave mentioned as you were to look through the 'ouse linen."

"Yes, cook!" said Myra dejectedly, "and I am afraid I shall not do it well. I am rather stupid about needlework."

"Don't be down-hearted, miss; there's a good bit to do, and you will be quite clever at it by the time you get through."

"I hope so, cook; I will take your advice and go out to see a friend who lives some way off, and I may stay to tea with her."

"Very well miss, only don't stay till hafter dusk. You'll hexcuse me. You see has you are but a young lady, and being left all to yourself, it is an obligation on you to be very careful; there's as much mischief done through ignorance as through knowledge of evil. I do hope you'll not think me presumptuous, miss."

"Indeed, I do not, cook," said Myra, smiling through her tears. "I am thankful that anyone cares whether I do right or wrong. I shall come back in daylight!"

It was some time before she could set forth. A flood of tears brought her relief, but made her unfit to be seen, till after an elaborate process of bathing her eyes with cold water and fanning them. Then a reaction came, as it does, happily, to youth. She would go and take some books from the schoolroom library—notably some German books, and a map of London to trace her way to Mrs. Keene's. She had not seen that valued friend for a long time, as she had not been at home on the occasion of her last visit.

Mrs. Keene would counsel her respecting a new frock and hat, to say nothing of a few important extras. At nineteen there is always comfort in a new dress, and our Myra was by no means of that lofty mental tone which would lift her above trifles. She had been so unaccustomed to buy anything for herself that she was nervously alive to the danger of not using her scanty supply of cash to the best advantage. As to her uncle's widow, she would never willingly see her face again. What had she, Myra, done to be treated as an outcast. Well, she would not break her heart about that. She would dress herself and make her way to her good friend Mrs. Keene, who always treated her with respectful kindness, who had known her sweet mother, the mother Myra had never known, but who must have been infinitely lovable, if the picture, painted by her father, which was one of her few treasures, at all resembled her. It was a long walk from Vale Terrace to Gilbert Street, Great Portland Street, but open air and motion were invigorating, and when she reached her destination Myra felt rather less fatigued than when she set out.

Mrs. Keene's interest in the young orphan arose from an accident in bygone times, when she was lady's maid in a Russian family, which occupied a grand suite of apart-

ments at Munich in the same house where Frederic Dallas and his belongings occupied the "quatrième." The Englishwoman was struck down by illness on the eve of starting with her employers for St. Petersburg. They left her in a garret, giving the *concierge* money to provide her needs. The illness proved to be an infectious fever, and Myra's mother, finding the sufferer was almost deserted, undertook to nurse the poor woman, and by her watchful care pulled her through. This act bound Mrs. Keene to the child of her benefactress. Through many vicissitudes she never lost sight of the artist and his daughter. Not long after her escape from the jaws of death, she married a courier, and was happy enough for some years. Having no children, she started a kind of private temperance hotel, which succeeded beyond her hopes. It was much frequented by quiet, careful customers of various nationalities, among whom were artists, and couriers, and even stray spinsters of severe respectability, recommended by old employers of the courier. The good woman's connection spread, for all those who were once her inmates were ready to return to her comfortable, well ordered house.

When Myra reached the door Mrs. Keene was parleying with a gentleman in the hall—a well-built man above middle height, dressed in an old shooting coat with many pockets. He wore a black silk handkerchief negligently knotted round his throat, and was holding a soft, broad-brimmed, brown felt hat in a sinewy, sunburnt hand. The shirt cuff from which it issued, however, was snowy white, and the whole bearing of the man was high-bred and refined. He was making some inquiries for an inmate who had left the previous day, when Mrs. Keene, turning from him to seek the address which had been left with her, perceived Myra.

"Oh, dear, miss, I did not expect you would be here to-day," she said.

The stranger moved aside with a bow to let her pass, but she paused, looked earnestly at him, as if she recognized his straight features, dark eyes, and auburn hair, then her pale, sad face lit up, and holding out her hand, she exclaimed:

"Jack! Jack Leyton, don't you know me?"

The gentleman thus addressed looked puzzled, but took the hand she offered.

"I am ashamed to say my memory plays me false. I cannot exactly recall you," he said.

"What! have you *quite* forgotten? and you used to be with my father every day in Munich—you *must* remember Bar Strasse and your friend Dallas!"

"Good God! then you are little Myra!" he exclaimed, letting his hat fall, and laying his other hand over hers for an instant. "This is an extraordinary recontre."

"Pray walk into my room, miss, if you would like to speak to the gentleman," said Mrs. Keene politely, as she opened the door of a small, neatly-furnished room at the back, with a ground-glass window.

"Oh, yes, do come in! I am so very, very glad to see you," cried Myra. The man she called Leyton followed her and closed the door.

"Now I look at you, your face and your blue eyes come back to me! I am ashamed of myself for not remembering you at once," he said. "I heard that you had lost your father, and I was awfully sorry for you. Then someone said your uncle, Colonel Dallas, had adopted you. That was when I was away in Egypt. I trust," looking at her with a keen, swift glance, "you are well and happy."

"I am quite well," she said, and he noticed that her lips trembled. "But Uncle Edward is dead, too."

"Ah!" said her new old friend, and he paused. "Where are you staying?"

"I am still at school," she returned, with a sad little smile.

"At school! Why you are quite grown up, and a good deal taller than I should have expected; you used to be quite a little thing—I am almost sorry you are not so still. I like little girls ever so much better than young ladies!" he added rather grimly.

"Oh, Jack! but you *must* like me!" cried Myra her blue eyes all but brimming over, "for my dear father's sake; and I have no one in the world to like me now."

Leyton looked very steadily, almost sternly at her, and then his face softened as he murmured to himself, "Poor child!" Then added:

"I suppose I may come and see you at this school of yours?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"Where is it? for I must leave you now. I have to keep an appointment."

Myra told him. He wrote the address in his pocketbook.

"You will be sure to come, Jack?" she said imploringly.

"Certain! but not to-morrow or the next day."

"On Saturday, then?"

"Yes, if I possibly can, and we will have a long talk. If I can help you, Myra, I will, for your father's sake. Good-by for the present."

CHAPTER III.

TAKING POSSESSION.

ABOUT the same time that poor Myra was gladdened by the phantom of past happy days, a young man of perhaps seven or eight and twenty was driving a well appointed dog-cart along the leafy lanes of a district not far distant from the mighty city, yet thoroughly rural and retired.

Two hours from King's Cross takes the traveler to the park-like scenery which surrounds the old country town of Redworth in Blandfordshire, where for miles he can drive through one fertile well cared for domain after another, till the impression of a whole country side of pleasure-ground becomes stamped upon his imagination. The young man was slight, well dressed, and soldierly looking, with clear, cold, gray eyes and neat sandy mustache. He handled the ribbons with a practiced hand, and seemed on the friendliest terms with the large, powerful chestnut mare in the shafts.

"I did not know it was so late," he said, turning his head to speak to the natty groom who sat behind, and who appeared to have been melted and run into a mold, so perfectly did his clothes, boots, and hat fit him.

"Yes, sir! There's the 5.25 down train;" and the man pointed to a distant line of white smoke as they crossed a steep bridge over the railway.

"Amazon must step out, then," returned his master; and touching his steed lightly on the flank they rattled on at a swinging pace that soon brought them to the station, which was almost half a mile on the near side of Redworth.

They were just in time to see the passengers descend from the London train, while the porters bustled about with their trucks full of luggage, and great bundles of evening papers were thrown on the platform.

Among the arrivals was a tall, slight, elderly man, with dark grizzled hair and whiskers, a nose that the irreverent

might describe as snub, and a pair of twinkling eyes, nondescript in color, but somewhat too light for his complexion. He was slightly stooped, yet moved alertly, and though his garments looked of the rough and ready order, he seemed thoroughly a gentleman.

On passing by the ticket collector he looked sharply round as if in search of someone, and then perceiving the dog-cart he waved his hand, and called in a loud tone, quite regardless of who might hear:

"Halloa, Cis!"

"All right!" returned the young man before described, "here you are."

The new-comer walked quickly to him and they shook hands cordially as they exchanged greetings.

"Dobbs," said the driver of the dog-cart to his groom, "go hurry them up with Mr. Wardlaw's luggage."

"Don't trouble; here it comes," said Wardlaw, as a porter was seen approaching with a portmanteau on his shoulder and a gun-case in his hand.

"Jump up, then," cried the younger man. "Dobbs will look after your traps! I never was so glad of anything as I was to find you had come back from Holland, for I have a hundred and one things to consult you about."

"Well! my poor wits are at your service! By George! Cis, my boy, a change has come o'er the spirit of your dream, and no mistake. No more need to sell the old place or exchange into the Line."

"No, nor to stay in the service if I do not like it."

"No! you are as free as air! Gad, the country is looking beautiful, and the crops are in first-rate condition. Have you much wheat laid down this year?"

"I hardly know. I haven't been here more than three or four days, and there has been a heap to look after."

So, talking on a variety of matters, but always with reference to some great change, which was to be discussed more fully afterward, they drove swiftly along the embowered lanes, across angles of open gorse-grown common, through bits of woodland, and up short, sudden hills, from the tops of which wide views over a rich, fair country were visible.

At length the entrance to a park appeared—wrought iron gates, and a pretty ivy-covered lodge. The chestnut mare pricked up her ears and quickened her pace, and a few

minutes more of a winding avenue brought them to a solemn-looking red brick mansion with stone copings and a steep roof of Queen Anne's period.

A clump of fine old limetrees sheltered it on the east, while on the southwest the ground fell away in a sudden descent which had been turned into a terraced garden, from which was a grand lookout over wood and plain. A double flight of broad stone steps met in a low arch, from which a third led to the entrance, whence issued a gentlemanlike looking servant out of livery, followed by another who seemed to be a groom, as the master drew up at the door.

"Welcome to Wickham Hall, my dear Wardlaw!" he exclaimed, throwing the reins to one of the men. "It must be ten years since you were here!"

"Not quite, but nearly nine, I imagine. It was the year before you left Sandhurst, and not long after your father died," replied Wardlaw, looking round. "Well, Cis, I am glad the old home is not to pass away from you;" and he followed his young host across the hall, which was lofty and spacious, with a parquet floor, to a handsome dining room, overlooking the terrace, and wide view beyond, where tea was set out.

The furniture, the hangings, the carpets, all looked faded, worn, and neglected, the melancholy traces of "decay's effacing fingers" were perceptible everywhere. The time before dinner was amply occupied by an examination of the stables, outhouses, dairy, and the etceteras of a high-class country gentleman's residence. At that meal many projects of repairs and improvements were discussed while the servants were in the room, but as soon as the friends were left to their wine and olives, and the door closed, there was a pause, and having filled his glass, Wardlaw resumed in a different tone:

"This is a wonderful turn of fortune for you, Cis!"

"It is," returned Cecil Forrester, the owner of the mansion and domain. "I never had the faintest hope that I should have come in for the money old George Dallas had scraped together. He and my father were second cousins, but had not much love for each other. I don't think I ever saw him but once in my life."

"When did he die?"

"Bare a month ago. It seemed he had made endless wills, bequeathing his property to all kinds of people and institutions. His solicitor told mine that he tore up his last not more than a week before his death, and was planning another more preposterous than before, when Death stepped in and—saved me."

"He had nephews. Are both dead?"

"Yes, of course, or I should be nowhere. The eldest, Colonel Edward Dallas, died only a week before his uncle. He had married a widow out in India—a deuced handsome woman, with a dash of the tarbrush, I fancy. I have met her at Lady Maria Vernon's ghastly parties. She is a fairly well-bred woman. He had no children. Then the younger Frederic was a bit of a black sheep—went to smash early; went off with another man's wife, I believe—an idiotic thing to do. He lived and died abroad. I don't know if he left any children or not—of course they would not count if he did."

"I knew Frederic Dallas once," said Wardlaw, with a far-away look in his shrewd eyes. "He was always an unlucky dog, but he was a good fellow, a thorough gentleman, and a true artist, though not a successful one; and I happen to know how he drifted, as he did into most things, into his connections with the poor woman you mentioned. She was English, of a good but decayed family, I fancy; she was married to an Italian, an awful brute, well off, but cruel and thoroughly bad. He soon tired of her, and led her the devil's own life. She fled from him, and took refuge with Fred Dallas, the only Englishman within reach. She was poor and friendless, and sought safety rather than love. She was a sweet creature when I saw her—quite twenty years ago. The husband made no attempt to pursue or punish her, and so she lived on with Dallas—there could be but one ending to such an affair. I fancy he was fond of her; their home seemed happy and well ordered enough, but there was always an underlying minor chord of sadness in her look and in her voice. I have quite lost sight of them. I fancy both are dead, at any rate, I hope *she* did not survive him; at that time they had no children."

"So much the better! It is amazing what fools people make of themselves," said Forrester, picking himself out a fat olive. Wardlaw cast a curious look at him.

"Your head was always a trifle older than your shoulders, Cis," he said, "though I am grateful to think you never gave me much trouble while you were my ward. Pray, were you never guilty of any follies yourself?"

"Never of a lasting one;" returned the young man coolly. "Still, do what I would in the way of prudence, I could not have stayed in the Hussars after we left India if these obliging kinsmen had not died off so opportunely. Frederic Dallas departed this life nearly four years ago, but of his companion I know nothing."

There was a brief pause, then Wardlaw, rousing himself with a sigh, asked:

"Do you intend to remain in the army?"

"Yes, for a year or two. I should rather like to tack 'colonel' to my name; but a year or two won't do that—I am not an enthusiastic soldier. I shall prefer developing this old place. There is room for improvement, but my father left it so loaded with debt that I have never had a shilling to lay out on it."

"Well, you will very probably marry money now."

"I should not object, but not for a good many years to come. I don't at all fancy matrimony. Having a woman at home in authority to whom one must always be civil is a horrible idea!"

"Many men don't recognize the obligation."

"Ah, well! I should like to present a decent appearance to society."

"You are a flinty-hearted young fellow. Are you so unnatural a monster as not to take pleasure in the society of women?" added Wardlaw, with a good-humored laugh.

"Oh! pleasure enough! but one can't live on sweets all one's life; such things are about good enough for second course. Now let us go into figures a little and see what it might cost to repair the stables and repaint the house."

"Very well! By the way, what a blow it must have been to the widow, this death of Edward Dallas just before his uncle! Had he lived even twenty-four hours longer than the old man, what a grand 'third' would have fallen to her share."

"I don't suppose she had any idea of such a chance, nor her husband either. George Dallas had not spoken to his nephews for years, and I suspect if anything could have

kept him alive it would be the desire to cut off his kindred from his wealth. However, let us hope he knows better now," concluded Forrester, with a well-satisfied laugh.

The conversation then turned on the improvements he contemplated, and the evening passed swiftly in discussing such an interesting topic.

"What leave have you, Cis?" asked his guest, as they were parting for the night.

"A couple of months. Not too much for all I have to do!"

"No. I dare say not. You might write to those builders to come down at once and make their estimates. I should like to know what they will suggest about a billiard room, which is an absolute necessity. I am due in Yorkshire at Carrington's on the 10th. He has asked a small party of real sportsmen for the 12th—no women; and he says the birds are abundant," said Wardlaw.

"I shall try what I can find here. I'm afraid the game has been awfully neglected. But I'll take care of it in future."

They then said good-night.

Cecil Forrester was a very modern young man, with a keen sense of comfort, and no particular enthusiasm about anything. Yet he was not unpopular in his regiment, for he was very straight in all his dealings, and the cool steadiness with which he avoided extravagance and debt—openly declaring his reasons—earned him a certain degree of respect. He attended sufficiently to his duties, but often wished he had been put into some profession in which he could have made money, which in his eyes was all important. He had been an only son, and adored by his father, who would have done anything for him except to restrain his habitual lavishness. He and his sister, who was several years his senior, had been left orphans to the guardianship of Wardlaw. She married early and had been some years dead, so there was no one to share Cecil's unexpected fortune.

No father could have made a better choice of a guide and protector for his son than the late squire of Wickham Hall did. Richard Wardlaw was a man of society, well known and well liked. He had been at school with the elder Forrester, and had been called to the bar. His early friends prophesied great things of him, and at first he worked

hard. Then he had a severe illness, a nervous fever, after which he was ordered abroad for rest and change, and for years he was unseen. Suddenly he reappeared. Sundry contributions from his pen to the high-class periodicals and literary weeklies, descriptions of out-of-the-corners he had visited, and strange races he had studied, recalled him to the cognizance of his former acquaintances, and he was cordially welcomed. Then he ceased to write, at least apparently. He established himself in a comfortable flat in the southwest district, and lived moderately, but like a gentleman, no one knew exactly how; for Forrester and other old intimates were well aware that he was a younger son of an impoverished county family. Now, he kept a grave German servant, and a good stout hack, went out a great deal to dinners, and belonged to a well-known club. He was looked upon as a shrewd man of the world, whose opinions were always heard with attention. He had been a careful guardian, and perhaps was the only person toward whom young Forrester felt any affection.

In truth, Wardlaw, who was a bit of a philosopher, was rather curious to see what affect the sudden accession of wealth would have upon his ex-ward, after the restrictions of his early days; and it gratified him to see that even in the first flush of emancipation he was by no means carried away by the sense of power money gives.

His visit to Wickham interested and amused him; he had a good many tastes, and building was one of them. To animals he was devoted, and it gave him more satisfaction to provide for the comfort of horses than for that of his fellow-men.

In the meantime Mrs. Edward Dallas found the grief, great or small, caused by her husband's death, swallowed up in her passionate indignation at the crass combination of circumstances which robbed her of a share in the wealth which ought to have been her husband's; circumstances had indeed been cruel to her. However, her only line of conduct was to keep up an air of gentle resignation and excite as much interest in the minds of her acquaintances as possible.

At present no one was in town to be impressed, so she devoted herself to the regulation of her affairs and the careful and methodical examination of her husband's papers,

from which she selected the few she thought it prudent to keep. These papers included many belonging to Frederic Dallas, among them some letters and memoranda relating to the unhappy mother of Myra, over which Mrs. Dallas sneered contemptuously.

That a woman should allow herself to drift into ruin because a man treated her badly seemed to her pitifully weak. She had only to keep her love affairs clear of her business matters, and to manipulate her wrongs skillfully and picturesquely, in order to convert them into a ladder, whereby she might climb to a safer position.

Her days, then, were well spent and agreeably varied by consultations with Mr. Deedes—plans for the future and estimates of the expenditure to which she intended to limit herself.

"When you have put away those things, Mrs. Dwyer," she said one afternoon, as the woman to whom the house belonged was removing her luncheon tray, "I wish you would come back; I wish to speak to you."

"Certainly, 'm," said Mrs. Dwyer deferentially.

Mrs. Dwyer had been housekeeper in a gentleman's family for many years, and had invested her savings in the furniture of a neat house in Melford Road. When it was completed, Mrs. Dallas, looking out for temporary quarters on her arrival from India nearly four years ago, was struck with the idea that it would be well to hire the owner as well as the tenement. It would be an immense saving of trouble, which the handsome widow hated, and possibly of expense. She therefore struck a bargain with the experienced Mrs. Dwyer, who undertook to provide servants for a fixed sum, and an excellent arrangement it proved for both parties.

Now it was somewhat doubtful whether the agreement would terminate or not. The landlady was just a little anxious—not that she liked Mrs. Dallas. There was something overbearing about her lodger, something that half irritated, half cowed her, but it had been what she termed "a good let." She had paid off her furniture and even invested a little money, so she hoped nothing would occur to disturb their relations.

"Well," said that lady, when Mrs. Dwyer re-entered the room, as she laid down the papers she had been reading,

and settled herself more comfortably among the sofa cushions, while she looked searchingly at her landlady through her half-closed lids, "I have a good deal to say to you, Mrs. Dwyer; you had better sit down."

This was unusual condescension. "She wants me to lower my rent!" thought Mrs. Dwyer, a tall, thin woman, with light reddish hair, rapidly becoming gray, worn in flat braids secured by a narrow band of black velvet, and surmounted by a bonnet-like cap of good white lace. She had somewhat faded, suspicious, wondering eyes, and long, bony hands—rather restless hands, given to playing with whatever was within reach while she talked. She was, as was her wont, neatly dressed in black.

"Thank you, 'm," said Mrs. Dwyer, taking a chair.

"I have been very uncertain as to my plans," resumed Mrs. Dallas, "but I have now made up my mind. How long have we been in your house, Mrs. Dwyer?"

"It will be four years the 7th of October since you signed the agreement, ma'am."

"And we have not been had tenants?"

"No, ma'am, not by no manner of means."

"Then you will not be displeased to find that I have decided to remain here, if you will agree to my terms. Of course I cannot afford to give the rent we used."

"No, ma'am?" interrogatively.

"No! but then I do not want all your house."

"I'm sorry for that, ma'am; of course a double set of lodgers makes a difference. That's why I let to you and the poor dear colonel so cheap!"

"Cheap, do you call it!" cried Mrs. Dallas.

"Well, it aint dear."

"N—no, not exactly, Mrs. Dwyer, but dear or cheap, I cannot afford to pay the same rent now, so I propose to keep the dining rooms and this floor. Then the two rooms above might let advantageously to a single gentleman, and you could make more of your house, although you let me part of it for thirty pounds less than I pay at present!"

"Thirty pounds less! that *is* a come down, ma'am. I don't think I could give into that."

An animated discussion followed, which ended in a slight surrender on both sides, and some conversation on minor points followed.

"I should think single gentlemen must be by far the most desirable lodgers," reiterated Mrs. Dallas, with a view to reconciling Mrs. Dwyer to the change she suggested.

"Well, I am not so sure, ma'am; you see they are apt to shift about; a man that is tied matrimonially is more fixed like."

"I am not so sure, Mrs. Dwyer; there is that gentleman at your friend's—at No. 24, I mean. Why he has been five or six years there."

"I know, ma'am, at Mrs. Sims's? She is no friend of mine; I don't hold with her conduct to that poor gentleman. It is now three weeks since I've seen him go by in the morning, and he used to be as regular as clockwork. The girl there—Mrs. Sims's servant—is friendly with my Hannah, and she was telling us the other evening that he is as rich as a Jew, but rather near, and grumbles over his weekly bills. Now, more than a fortnight ago he was took rather unwell, and Mrs. Sims doctored him a bit—she was a nurse in a hospital, and they know a lot too much. Well, since that he has been queer and dazed-like, and shaky on his legs, and I can't help thinking it's terribly like a tale I read in the *London Messenger*, where there was the awfulest bad woman I ever heard of. She gives a dose of particular poison to a poor gentleman, that makes him lose the use of his legs and the power of speech, and gets his keys and his money and the jewels he intended for his granddaughter, who was stolen away by a dreadful villain, the husband—or anyway, he *ought* to have been her husband—of the bad woman!"

"But, Mrs. Dwyer," rather contemptuously, "what has all this to do with a respectable householder in Melford Road?"

"Well, ma'am, I may be an ignorant woman, but it seems to me that Mrs. Sims is tampering with that poor, defenseless man! Mark my words, ma'am, many a cruel wrong is done under the mask of respectability. Why down there at No. 17, just before you come, there was a young lady and her brother living; they rented the house, and it was full of beautiful furniture, all their own. Well, one day I heard the awfulest screams, so I ran to see, and there was two of the biggest ruffians, as far as looks went, and her own brother forcing her into a carriage, and she

declaring she wasn't mad, and begging for mercy. She was as sensible as you or me, ma'am."

"Probably more sensible, if you believe such rubbish," said Mrs. Dallas.

"Anyway, ma'am, the doctor who signed the order, or whatever you call it, for her to be took off, shot himself, I was told; and the brother, who wanted to force her to marry some fellow-scamp of his own, went into an asylum," concluded Mrs. Dwyer in an indignant tone.

"Ah! evidently there was insanity in the family!"

"Maybe so, ma'am, but some people would not be convinced though one rose from the dead. I have seen queer things in my time, but of course I haven't the power of expressing myself as I could wish; but it's no matter! I'll just make a fresh agreement, Mrs. Dallas, and if you'll sign it why we can see about transposing the furniture, ma'am."

"Very well," said Mrs. Dallas; and her landlady departed with wrath in her heart.

"Thinks she knows better than anyone else," she muttered to herself. "I'm not sure she isn't up to a murder or two herself! I've seen the devil's own look in those big black eyes of hers. God only knows what she did with the poor colonel. He went off all of a sudden at the last."

So building up a romance to herself she went to inspect the washing up of the luncheon things, and to prepare Mrs. Dallas's small but dainty dinner.

Though the worthy landlady had taken brevet rank she was a spinster, of Irish parentage, born and brought up in London—a curious mixture of credulity and skepticism—a voracious appetite for the wildest romance, and the hardest common sense in everyday matters. She loved scraping money together, yet was capable of generosity to the very few she loved—a topsy-turvy nature in which the Celtic element predominated, and, above all, a shrewd, clever woman, whom education and training might have developed into something above the common.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR.

THE anticipated joy of talking about her beloved past to one who had shared it, who who known her father and all her surroundings, respecting which she had not found a congenial listener for more than three dreary years, was like a draught of some invigorating elixir to Myra Dallas. In the fullness of her heart she told cook that she had met an old friend of her father's, and that he was coming to see her.

Cook pictured an elderly, portly, gray-haired gentleman who might be a useful friend to the solitary young creature of whom she had been left in charge.

The idea of Leyton's visit inspired Myra with new energy. She brought down piles of house linen and darned diligently under the cook's directions; only in the evening she gave herself the indulgence of a book.

The pianos were all locked and covered with huge dusting sheets, so she was cut off from a favorite amusement, *i. e.*, wandering from one musical memory to another, occasionally improvising, in waltz time, or in more sad and solemn measure.

Three or four days passed and no Leyton presented himself. Myra's hopes began to falter; perhaps, like everyone else, he had gone away out of town. At last, on a fine afternoon, she heard cook's voice in the garden, which communicated by a passage at the side of the house with the front.

"If you'll step this way, sir," it said, "Miss Dallas is in the study."

The next moment Mr. Leyton stepped through the door-window, and looked quickly round as he shook hands with the daughter of his old friend.

It was a bare, shabby room, a large table covered in much rubbed and scratched leather, deal shelves crowded with shabby school books, an empty grate unconcealed by any ornament, a square of much-worn carpet under the

table, surrounded by a border of linoleum, a few colored prints from the illustrated papers on the wall, a range of much-bespattered inkbottles on the mantelshelf, and several cane chairs in various stages of dilapidation, comprised the furniture and decorations. Myra was as unadorned as her abode. Her old black frock, rubbed shiny in places, was slightly relieved by a large, white, German-looking apron; her hair was brushed back, rising in a sort of "Imperatrice" style from its own thickness, and roughly coiled round a very common comb, leaving her wide but somewhat low forehead and quite pathetic face quite unshaded.

"So, Myra—I may call you Myra, I suppose, though you *are* grown up—you are left alone, evidently," said Leyton, when they had exchanged greetings.

"Yes!" resuming her seat on the ottoman—really a box to contain odds and ends—having given her visitor the only comfortable chair, a basketwork lounge; "you see this is a school. I have lived here ever since—since I left Munich."

"It is time you left school now, Myra!"

"I think so too, but I have nowhere else to go."

There was a slightly embarrassed pause. Leyton thought him of certain rumors that his friend Dallas had never been married to the lady who passed as his wife, and gazed compassionately at the fair, slight young creature whose earnest blue eyes looked so innocently into his.

"No! I think I remember you had no near relations," he said at length.

"The only relations I ever heard of or knew of was my Uncle Edward—Colonel Dallas. He was *very* good to me, and I could have loved him very much, but he is dead too," she ended, her voice falling into a sad cadence.

Leyton saw that her blue eyes were full of tears.

"I think I have met Colonel Dallas in India before I knew your father," he said.

"What! were you in India, Jack?" she said wonderingly.

"Yes, years ago. But didn't your uncle marry? Can't you go and live with his widow?"

Myra shook her head. "She does not want me—she does not like me. She told me not to call her aunt any more! And *I* do not like her! I have a curious sort of fear of her!"

"Ah! I suppose she is a stern, severe, old dame?"

"Oh, no! she is almost young, and *very* handsome, and she has been generous—that is, she is going to give me money every quarter."

"Indeed! then you ought to get out of this wretched place."

"It is not wretched, Jack! It is rather grand upstairs. There are blue damask curtains and lace ones, and thick carpets in the drawing room, and ornaments, and everything is kept desperately clean. But, oh! everything is ugly! I suppose you could not come through the hall, because the men are there with their ladders whitewashing."

"But, my dear child, it is an awfully dreary place for you. I suppose your friends are all out of town?"

"I don't think I have any friends," said Myra quietly, thoughtfully. "Oh, Jack, it was more dreadful than I can tell you, coming away from everything I had ever known to this cold, strange place; I wanted to die; but Death only comes when he is not wanted! Then it was some comfort to speak to my uncle; but Mrs. Dallas rarely left us alone together. Then I got used to things; some of the girls are kind; I think they are fond of me. Mrs. Fairchild—she is the head of the school—is not bad; she is not disagreeable. Now I am to teach German, and so I shall have work—not that I am particularly fond of work—but I shall not be able to think so much. It does seem funny to be so different from other girls; they have uncles, and aunts, and cousins, and heaps of relations, even when they *are* orphans! I don't seem to have any at all! But I will not think of the present when I can talk of the old days to you, Jack. You are the only creature I have seen for nearly four long years that knows anything about me!"

"Poor child!" said Leyton, his quick, impatient brown eyes growing tenderly compassionate as he gazed upon her. He was by no means soft-hearted; indeed, he had been hardened by some bitter experiences, some rough passages in his career, but at that moment he could have taken this delicate-looking, lonely child in his arms, and soothed her as a father might.

"I wish I *were* a child," said Myra with a sigh. "I

wish I could stay a child; but I am nineteen, rather more than nineteen. My birthday is in June."

"You do not look nineteen," said Leyton.

"It is rather curious," returned Myra, looking thoughtfully at him, "that *you* look much younger to me than you did. I used to think you as old as my dear father; now you seem years younger."

"Your father was comparatively a young man when I knew him."

"And how sweet and good he was," she continued. "My idea of heaven is sitting on his knee and leaning my head against him, while he told me fairy tales, such lovely tales! then suddenly everything came to an end. It was a terribly hot season, and so much fever."

She proceeded to recount a few particulars of her father's illness and death, the coming of her uncle, the terrible plunge into the coldness and darkness of her present position—all without tears—with uncomplaining, hopeless resignation.

Then the conversation turned on the details of their old happy life in her father's studio, which Leyton had shared for a time; of their expeditions to the park of Nymphenburgh, their evenings in the Thier Garten, where they enjoyed the open-air concerts, and the homewards troll back in the soft warm summer nights, to the supper provided by old Hedwig.

"Do you remember, Jack? I used to sew the buttons on your gloves when you were going out."

"Did you, Myra? Well, I need not trouble you now. I generally dispense with such superfluities."

"Do you?" said Myra, opening her eyes; "and you used to wear such beautiful gloves."

"I have left all that sort of finery far behind;" said Leyton with a harsh laugh.

"I suppose you have grown a great painter?" said Myra with awe.

"Indeed I have not, Myra," he returned. "I have done nothing great. But I do paint. I have been away in Egypt for nearly two years, doing sketches for one of the illustrated papers, and letter-press, too; now I am using up some of the material I accumulated, and have just finished a couple of pictures."

"Then you have a studio. O Jack! dear Jack! do let me come and see it!" cried Myra, clasping her hands; "*do!*"

"Yes, of course you can. When will you come?"

"Whenever it suits you."

"I am going out of town from next Saturday to Wednesday. Come on Thursday."

"Oh, thank you! How delightful it will be to smell the paint, to see the colors, the half-finished things, the bits of drapery and armor."

"My studio is rather bare, as yet," said Leyton smiling, "but you are very welcome to inspect it, and you can bring anyone you like—Mrs. Keene, for instance."

"Oh! thank you, dear Jack!"

"Don't you draw, yourself, Myra? I fancy you used to do something in that line."

"Yes, I can draw a little, and I am very fond of it; but since I came here I could do nothing. They think I work so roughly and coarsely. I cannot please the master. How I wish *you* would teach me, Jack!"

"Teach you!" repeated Leyton a rather grim smile curling his lips. "I am afraid we could not manage *that*."

"Ah, yes; it is unreasonable of me to ask it," cried Myra, blushing vividly as if ashamed of her own presumption.

Leyton looked at her steadily as he thought, "that girl will charm some fellow out of his reason some day, and so much the worse for her."

"Tell me," he asked purposely to turn the subject, "did your poor father leave nothing behind him? nothing in the way of property for you? He certainly had some independence?"

"Oh, I cannot tell! Mrs. Dallas, my uncle's wife, said I had nothing in the world, but that out of charity she would give me five pounds a quarter."

"The devil she did!" cried Jack Leyton. "She must be a kind-hearted woman or——" He paused.

"Yes!" returned Myra thoughtfully, "that is what I think; only the 'or' is very big."

Leyton looked at her in some surprise. "Had this gentle, innocent-looking girl any conception of the world's wiles and wickedness?"

"Jack," said Myra softly, after a pause, "did you ever know my mother?"

"No," he returned. "She was dead some years before I fell in with your father."

"It is so curious that *no* one seems to have known her or her people—not a soul. I have her picture. It is the only thing I brought away with me from Munich!"

"I remember seeing the portrait."

"Ah, that was a large one! My father made quite a small copy for *me*; I will fetch it"—and she left the room.

Leyton stood with his shoulder against the window frame, his eyes gazing far away, and his face very grave.

"The sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children," he thought. "There is a hard life before that poor child. Even if I had it in my power I could scarcely venture to help her. I can scarcely help myself. What a weak, hot-headed fool I have been! I wonder what has become of the poor father's bit of property? I must try and see the widow of Colonel Dallas, not formally, though, or I should never find out anything; and I have nearly dropped out of society."

"Here it is," said Myra, re-entering with a small square parcel in her hand, which she proceeded to unfold. "Look! Is it not a sweet face?" she said, holding out the miniature.

Leyton took it silently. It was both sweet and sad, very sad.

"It is like you," he remarked at last, "especially about the eyes, though yours are darker."

"How sad she looks!" continued Myra, thoughtfully. "Yet my father loved her dearly. How can anyone who is fondly loved be unhappy?"

"Many things are needed for happiness," returned Leyton vaguely.

"I do not think so, Jack." Then she paused, looked earnestly at the picture, and kissed it softly before she wrapped it up again.

Leyton was more touched than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. After a moment's silence he tried to turn his own and her thoughts from the cruel memory of her mother, the full cruelty of which he prayed she might never know.

"I think I have a sketch of your father among my goods and chattels; rather a daub, I am afraid, for I was but a beginner in those days. I will look for it. If it is not too large you shall have it."

"Thank you, oh, thank you! I shall prize it dearly."

Then Leyton drew her into talk about herself—her position, her companions, her hopes.

It was a dreary picture she unconsciously drew, and he wondered at the calmness with which she gave the details he asked.

"How can she face such a life?" he thought. "Is it courage or is it the deadness of indifference? only the vitality of youth can uphold her."

At length he rose to end the interview he found so deeply, yet painfully, interesting.

"I must give you directions how to reach my studio, Myra," he said; "by the way, I ought to treat you more respectfully, and call you Miss Dallas."

"Why? No! pray do not. If you do I must call you *Mr.* Leyton, and that seems to put you so far away."

"Oh! ladies may do and say what they like. What is condescension in you is a liberty in me!"

"Fancy *me* condescending to you!" cried Myra, laughing a youthful, joyous laugh, which delighted Leyton.

"There is some life left in her, thank God," he thought, as he smiled back sympathetically.

"I am by no means the potent, grave, and reverend seignior you imagine," he said. "I am quite a Bohemian, Myra, and indeed, a bit of a failure. However, you will come to see me, will you not? My studio, which I share with a chum of mine, is at Shelden House, Shelden Gardens, near the Swiss Cottage. It is an old-fashioned place, with a side entrance; in fact, we have rigged up the stables at the back—they don't make a bad studio—and I live very near; you might get an omnibus from——"

"I can walk quite well," said Myra. "I know the Swiss Cottage; we often walk up there."

"You seem too slender and willowy to be much of a walker, Myra," looking scrutinizingly at her. "You are a good deal taller than I expected you would be—you were such a childish little creature when I knew you."

"But then I was only thirteen or fourteen. Oh, I have

grown a hundred years older, and learned so much—so much since!”

“I dare say you have. What do you do with yourself all alone here?”

“I have needlework to do, and a few books, but I have read them all; and the pianos are locked up.”

“I must send you some books. You go and see that hotel woman sometimes? She seems an honest, sensible creature.”

“Yes, I love her; she is so good to me. Do send me some books, dear Jack.”

“Very well. There is my address; don’t lose it.”

“You may be sure I will not; and Jack, though I *am* grown-up, you *will* like me.”

“I will try,” said Leyton, with kindly good-humor.

She came out with him to the gate, and waved him goodbye as he turned and raised his hat to her.

Then she went back to her work, singing over it in the gladness of her heart, for she had found a living link with the golden past, a voice which fell upon her ear as an echo from the only home she had ever known—a friend, a father; well, no, not exactly a father. Jack had grown so much younger than her memory had represented, that she must be content to look on him as an elder brother; and come what might, in five or six days she should see him again, and wander round his studio and be at home once more.

On his part Jack Leyton walked with a quick, firm step down the long straight road in which Ruby Lodge was situated, toward Maida Vale. He had been more moved by this interview than he would have cared to acknowledge.

“Poor young thing!” he murmured to himself. “Yet not a child. There is character in her brow, and thought in her eyes. She is absolutely without knowledge of the world. What a charm! yet how cruel to let a girl go down into the battle utterly defenseless. I can be of little or no use to her. I wish she had a wise woman friend. I have dropped all mine—the only one who has looked me up since I came back is Lady Shirland; and I am rather afraid of her schemes. I’ll go and see if she is in town. To think of little loving Myra having grown up into this pale, pliant lily-like creature! Her head and throat would exactly suit

that picture I want to do; and what eyes! There's an unexplored world in them. But I shall not be the explorer. No; I have had enough of that sort of thing, and I shall be all the more interested if I do not know quite everything that lurks under that fair seeming. Have I not known eyes as holy, behind which lurked seven devils at least? Poor little Myra! It is hard on a girl to be left as she has been."

CHAPTER V.

TEA IN A STUDIO.

A FEW days after this delightful visit Myra gave herself no other treat.

It had been a damp, drizzling day, which somewhat quenched the brightness that had pervaded her spirits since she had talked with Leyton; but toward evening the clouds broke, and the sun looked out to say good-night to his side of the world.

"I will go and see Mrs. Keene," she said to cook, who had come in to ask if she would mind doing with an egg or her supper, "so I shall not want any supper."

"That's a good bit off, miss, aint it?"

"Yes, it is in Gilbert Street, Great Portland Street."

"Dear me, miss, I wonder if I might trouble you to leave my spectacles at Mudge's in Edgware Road; one of the glasses is loose, and I am that dependent on them I——"

"Oh, I will take them with pleasure, cook. I can walk down there and take the train from Edgware Road."

"I am afraid, miss, I am taking too great a liberty."

"Not at all. I shall go at once and come back before dark."

The cook thanked her in choice language, and Myra hastened to put on hat and cloak and started on her expedition.

On getting into a carriage at Edgware Road her eye was caught by a familiar face, a face that smiled grimly at her.

"Ah, Mrs. Dwyer! how do you do?" said Myra, with her usual frank kindness, glad to recognize anyone. "Are you quite well?"

"Pretty middling, Miss Dallas, thank you. I hope you are well; if I may take the liberty of saying so, you're looking a deal better than when I seen you last. You have not been nigh us for a long time, miss."

"I have been very busy," said Myra. "I suppose Mrs. Dallas is out of town, like everyone else?"

"No, miss; she aint. I did hear talk of her going on a visit to the Countess of Shirland at Eastbourne, but she still stays on a-rummaging and a-sorting of papers day and night, in a manner of speaking. I sometimes wonder if some of them might be yours, miss?"

"No, I don't think so," returned Myra carelessly. "I suppose Mrs. Dallas would give me anything of mine she happened to find."

"I'm sure I hope so, miss," said Mrs. Dwyer with a sniff.

"Mr. Ashby, he is still away on the continent. I heard his ma say to the Rev. Mr. McClure that he had had a few more holidays, as he had been taken unwell, and she didn't want him to hurry back. I don't think there's much the matter with him. Will you be down our way, miss? I'm sure I was always glad to see you come into the house, and so was the poor dear colonel. I'm sure if he'd been alive he'd always have had you by him. Ah, there's no knowing the mischief and muddles that comes of jealousy; there's no wickedness a jealous woman isn't up to!"

"Why, Mrs. Dwyer, you frighten me!" said Myra, laughing. "I hope we shall never meet such dreadful creatures."

"I'm sure I hope not, but there's no knowing. I'm apt to let my tongue run on where my heart is full, but I am sure I am safe with you, miss."

"Quite safe, Mrs. Dwyer! This is my station, so good-by."

Though the out-of-season time was often Mrs. Keene's busiest, her caravansary being much frequented by the humbler class of foreigners, the doorway and entrance of the Hotel was this afternoon unoccupied. No one was to be seen for the moment, so Myra walked through to the back parlor, and tapping gently, ventured to open the door of Mrs. Keene's sanctum without waiting for a reply. She beheld the broad toes of a pair of comfortable house shoes crossed and upturned as though resting on the heel of one of them; above, a voluminous black merino skirt, and the lower part of a black silk apron, while all else was hidden by the widespread sheet of the *Times*, which sloped back against something; it was held at one side by some fat fingers, and overtopped by a tuft of lace and bright red rib-

bons; a gentle sound, louder than breathing, softer than snoring, broke the silence.

Myra, smiling, closed the door, and slight as was the noise, it aroused the sleeper, who dropped the paper and sat up rubbing her eyes.

"Why, my goodness gracious, missee, are you there! I was just taking forty winks after running about the whole blessed morning. I'm sure I'm delighted to see you," rising and setting a chair for her guest. "I was going to write you a line this very afternoon if I could have got time; that stupid, tiresome woman brought your frock here this morning, for she had never put down your address, so forgot all about it. I was going to send it up to you by parcel delivery; now you can try it on and see how it goes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Keene; and I can take it back myself."

"No, no, don't you trouble! Why, it's past five, you must be famished for want of your tea! so am I, I'm sure," and moved swiftly toward the bell.

Mrs. Keene was a short, globular woman, with nearly white hair and, bright, beady, black eyes. She had a kindly, rosy, smiling face, and rejoiced in the most gorgeous caps. With all her sunny good nature she had a will of her own, and ruled her house firmly in the frequent absence of her husband, a veteran courier, who still continued his vocation more from love of it than any necessity.

"How have you been?" asked Myra kindly, as she removed her hat, and taking the proffered seat, with cheerful anticipations of tea—for she usually had a natural healthy appetite, and the meals at Ruby Lodge were *not* luxurious.

"Well! I'm always well, you know. Willie had a cold, so I have sent her down to my sister's for a bit. You are looking brighter, missee. Any news of Mrs. Dallas?"

"No; she has not asked for me, and I shall not ask for her. I have no claim on her, and I shall just keep out of her way."

"Why, it's as well; but I should like to know if your father left a will, or anything in the shape of cash behind him."

"I am sure he did not," said Myra, shaking her head.

"My uncle would have been sure to tell me and settle everything."

"I suppose so," returned Mrs. Keene with a sigh. "Bring a slice or two of cold ham," she added to the servant who was setting the tea tray. "I think there are some macaroons in the cupboard there, and let us have some brown bread and butter. Be sure you cut the ham like a wafer. Now we'll have a comfortable chat; there isn't much doing to-day."

How delightful it was to sit at tea with this genial, hospitable, humble friend; to feel so heartily welcome, that her presence was a real pleasure, and to be treated as something decidedly superior. Then Mrs. Keene was the only one left who had known Myra's mother, and always spoke of her as an angel. The chains of her subordinate life seemed to fall from her and leave her free and happy, once Myra found herself within the cozy, comfortable precincts of Mrs. Keene's little parlor.

"Now as you won't take anything more, missie, suppose you try on your dress; then if there is any alteration I will see to it before you take it home."

"Oh, thank you, dear Mrs. Keene. If you show me I can do it myself. I have only too much time and I ought not to impose on your goodness."

"I would do more than that for your mother's child, missie. Come up to Willie's room."

So saying, she opened a door beside the fireplace which Myra thought was a cupboard, and which probably had been, for it led into a short passage four or five feet square with shelves on the left, at the farther side of which was a larger space, though still small; lighted by a pane of glass over a door, which possessed a large key, bolts, and a chain. On the left of this, a narrow, steep stair led upward.

"I never was through here before," said Myra.

"No, I dare say not. This is our own bit of a place," returned Mrs. Keene. "We bought a scrap of a house round the corner, and opened a passage through. It just gives us three rooms for ourselves and a couple of bedrooms for the hotel, but there's an entrance above to them. The street door there aint much good, for you may knock and knock, but if Wilhelmina or me aint in the parlor no one

will hear. Just come upstairs to her room; I put your dress there."

It was a neatly kept, neatly furnished and decorated chamber; and Myra, whose love of prettiness was ardent though half-starved, looked round with a passing sensation of envy.

"What a nice room!" she cried. "It's nicer than mine at Munich, though that was charming; the view was lovely, and I had flowers and a *shreibtisch*. Oh, the dress looks very nice!"

An interesting half hour was spent in "trying on" and "pinning" the few necessary alterations.

"Might I sit down and sew it in your parlor?" asked Myra. "It would be so pleasant to have you there, and I could try it on once more to see if it was all right."

"Yes, do, my dear; I'll be in and out and see that it goes right."

The work progressed happily, and Mrs. Keene was not called away very frequently.

"Where is Mr. Keene now? I hope he is well?" asked Myra, when her friend settled down to darn some stockings.

"Well, he is in the Black Forest somewhere, and had a shocking bad cold when he wrote last. I wish he'd make up his mind to stay at home. The hotel aint doing badly, but law! he can't bear to be quiet. He gets that fidgety when he is a few weeks at home; there is no doing nothing with him. Ah! a courier's is a fine life, Miss Myra, and a good position. It is just one of the good things a woman never can get."

"I am not so sure of that," said Myra. "There are courier maids now. I have seen advertisements about them. I think I should like to be one by and by. I wonder could Mr. Keene help me?"

"Mind, missie, you are taking that in a trifle too much; don't draw your hand so tight. Could Keene help you to go *courying*; why gracious goodness me, Miss Myra, is that fit work for a lady?"

"I am sure I don't know, and I don't care. All I want is to earn my bread without troubling anyone, and though I do not wish to be silly, I wish—oh, how I wish I could do without Mrs. Dallas's money! You see now I haven't

a friend or a relation in the world except you, and I don't want to trouble you too much."

"That you never can," said Mrs. Keene, low and impressively. "Your dear blessed mother risked her life for me, and saved mine, and I'll stand by you as long as I have a shilling. I have a few, thank God."

"It is very sweet to think I owe your great goodness to my dear mother," returned Myra softly, pausing as she drew out her thread. "Indeed I do not mind about being a lady, but life in a school is very dreary. I suppose I am a poor creature, but it is very hard for me to do what I don't like; it makes me stupid to try."

"But, my dear, you might easily find a place as companion to an elderly lady, and be in the right kind of position, and maybe marry some nice gentleman."

"There are so many nice young ladies that it is not likely I should be chosen; besides, I have my own fancies. It would be very charming to marry a kind, pleasant artist. That *would* be delightful! I could wash his brushes for him, and understand a little when he talked about art, and help him in many small things. Someone like my dear father. But ah, that would be too much happiness for me;" and with a deep sigh Myra resumed her work.

Mrs. Keene gazed at her with moist eyes.

"If you please, 'm, there's a gentleman as wants a sitting room and bedroom for a week," said one of the maids entering.

"And couldn't you answer him without worrying me?" cried Mrs. Keene sharply, rising and rolling out of the room; her mode of progression suggested well oiled casters; she moved with a steady evenness.

When she returned and replaced a stocking on her plump fist she changed the subject.

"Have you seen that gentleman you met here last week since?" she asked.

"Oh! yes; he came to see me—very kindly. He was a great friend and comrade of my father's; he used to work in his studio, and was so good to me when I was a little girl. He taught me to like English books—he gave me the few I have. How he and my father used to talk of art and music and government and politics. I liked to listen, though I did not understand. I hated to be sent to bed."

"Why, the gentleman doesn't look much over thirty-five now!"

"I am sure I do not know; he seemed about my father's age when I knew him; but things are rather indistinct to me. Jack—Mr. Leyton must have been more than two years in Munich; then something or other happened, some trouble, and he went away all in a moment."

"I hope he did not leave Mr. Dallas to pay his debts," said Mrs. Keene severely.

"Oh, no!" said Myra, laughing merrily. "I never heard of it if he did. He is going to show me his pictures; I *shall* be glad to see pictures again."

"He looked like a gentleman, I must say, though a bit dry and short in his manners." There was a pause.

"And when will Mr. Keene be back?" asked Myra, taking off her thimble and sticking her needle in the case.

"Late in September. He has been with some old clients of his—Lady Shirland and her daughter, or rather her step-daughter. They travel about a good deal."

"How nice that must be. I suppose they are great ladies."

"Well, they are a bit mixed. Her ladyship, you see, was very highly connected herself, but she was left early a widow with little or nothing. Lord Shirland was a poor peer, and married late in life. Then she married a Mr. Brown—a Manchester man, rich as Cræsus—a widower with one daughter. Then *he* died, and left all his money to the daughter. She and her ladyship hit it off very well, though she is a terrible handful. She has delicate health, and if she isn't out every night of her life she must be trying 'cures,' and running from one doctor to another. She is very fond of Keene, and I must say, generous and open-handed enough. Her ladyship has tried hard to marry her, but it isn't easy; she takes fancies and all that, and then changes her mind."

"Lady Shirland!" repeated Myra. "My aunt—I beg her pardon—I mean Mrs. Dallas, used to know a lady Shirland. Has she a big house in Caterham Gardens?"

"That's them!" exclaimed Mrs. Keene ungrammatically.

"I never saw them," said Myra, "but Mrs. Dallas grew rather intimate with them before my dear uncle died."

"I called there once," continued Mrs. Keene, "with a

message from my husband, and saw the young lady,—not that she is so very young,—and she just dazed me with questions. Now, my dear, you had better try that dress once more.” The “essay” was most satisfactory. “You’ll excuse me, missie, for asking, but have you another hat?”

“No, indeed!” rather sadly. “I am afraid to ask about a hat.”

“Well, now is your time to get one cheap—the sales are on! I’ll come with you as far as Oxford Street, and find you a nice black straw hat for a couple of shillings; then a quarter of crape and a yard of ribbon will make it quite smart—leave it to me. Many and many a hat that no milliner need be ashamed of I’ve turned out. I’ll have it ready by Saturday, if you can come and have a cup of tea.”

“Dear Mrs. Keene, how good you are! That would be too delightful. I have only eighteen pence with me, but I have nearly three pounds in my money box at home—at the school, I mean; then I must pay the dressmaker.”

“You just leave it to me; I’ll let you know what the whole thing comes to, and you can pay it back.”

So the afternoon ended in a satisfactory transaction at a celebrated emporium, and Myra went on her homeward way almost rejoicing.

“I shall go to church on Sunday in my nice new things,” were her parting words. “And I am far happier in church than anywhere; the music and the quiet, especially when it grows dusk at the evening service, make me forget the life about me.”

Leyton, who was a lover of sport, as well as of art, had gone to shoot with an artist friend, who was in country quarters at a farm house in Wales, where the lord of the manor was an old acquaintance, and gave him free range over moor and mountain, as he, the proprietor, was not to be at home that autumn.

The scenery was grand, the birds abundant, and in the company of his chum time passed quickly, yet Leyton was constantly haunted by the picture left upon his imagination by his old comrade’s daughter. The tall, slight, willowy figure, conveying an idea of delicacy and grace that needed protection; the changeful, expressive face, that seemed too transparent for the safety of its owner; the

large, earnest, innocent, blue eyes. Surely this desolate young creature was utterly at the mercy of a cruel world. How could any woman forsake her, as her uncle's wife had done?

"But I am an idiot to ask that," thought Leyton, as he put up his sketching apparatus one evening, when the fading light compelled him to desist. "Who can say what a woman is capable of? They can be exquisitely tender and infinitely cruel, false, or faithful, according to the impulse that moves them. Are they responsible for their variability? God knows! perhaps the most potent charm the dear devils possess is their uncertainty. Could a strong, reasonable woman be attractive? I doubt it; at any rate, I have no chance of trying. I wonder if that innocent looking, soft-eyed darling will break some fellow's heart? or break her own? Both, probably, and both will get mended and hide their scars, and pass an apparently flawless life to high fortune, perhaps, or to a pauper's grave. I should like to secure her a chance of going straight—protection, kindly shelter. What a splendid model she would be for that picture I am thinking of, but I'll not ask her; not to insure success and a thundering big price; no, it would never do. I must see what's to be done with Lady Shirland and Dorothea. I am about the most useless friend she could have." Arriving at this discouraging conclusion, Leyton shouldered his traps and walked off toward his temporary home at a swinging pace.

The next day he returned to London. Thursday, the much anticipated Thursday, was a clear, sunny, autumnal day. Myra arrayed herself in her new dress and hat, and heartily indorsed Mrs. Keene's opinion of her own skill in millinery.

"I really look quite nice, only I wish my gloves were newer, but that doesn't matter much."

It was rather a long walk from Ruby Lodge to the studio; and Leyton had glanced more than once at an old French clock on the high mantelshelf, the hands of which pointed to 4.10, when he muttered:

"She is behind time; she can't have forgotten, but something newer may have turned up."

He put down his palette, and went to a table on which stood a motley tea equipage—three cups, one of rare china,

the others quite common, all different, a glass cream jug, a bright but battered tin teapot, and a small brass spirit kettle, the lamp of which he proceeded to light. Then he gave a touch or two to some flowers in a china bowl—mignonette and big yellow daisies—while a smaller, choicer nosegay occupied a glass vase. The studio was, as he had said, rather bare—a couple of big Japanese screens, some very dusty, worm-eaten, carved oak chairs, a few plain Windsor ones, some broad strips of richly-colored Japanese paper, and one tapestried panel with a few bits of embroidered drapery were but a scanty plenishing, compared to the luxurious accessories usual in a modern atelier. As Leyton paused to contemplate his dispositions, an exceedingly discordant bell tinkled hysterically. He hastened to open the door, which was hidden behind the biggest of the screens, and admitted Myra. Myra, looking so bright, so fresh, so elegant in her nicely fitting frock and pretty hat, and flushed by her rapid walk, that she seemed a different being from the pale, sad child he had talked to last week.

"I began to be afraid you had forgotten me;" was Leyton's greeting, as he looked behind her in vain for the chaperon he had suggested. "Couldn't Mrs.—what's her name, come?"

"Forgotten," cried Myra, as she followed him into the room; "why, I thought the day would never come. As to Mrs. Keene, I did not ask her; she is always busy, and I did not want her."

"Well, I am sure *I* don't want her!" exclaimed Leyton, yielding to a momentary impulse. "You and I have enough to talk of about the old days in Munich without a stranger."

"Mrs. Keene is not a stranger, though," returned Myra. "She used to be in Munich too, both before and after you, and when I came to London she found me out, and has been *so* good. Why, she trimmed this hat for me."

"Indeed, it is a work of art!" eying it with grave admiration. "Now you must have a cup of tea before you look round."

"Oh, I don't care for any tea, Jack—" began Myra.

"Well, I do! Come, you must 'pour out' for me. I don't know when I had a lady to pour out tea before."

"Oh! very well; if you want your tea that is different;"

and Myra sat down, drawing a long pin from her hat and putting it aside unasked.

"You have a nice large studio," was her next remark, "and a very good light."

"Yes. It will be awfully cold in winter, though."

"You have not been in it long?"

"Only since last April."

Delightful rambling talk ensued, old German memories moving Myra to tears and smiles.

It was long since Leyton had enjoyed a talk so much. Myra brought with her an atmosphere of innocent, youthful candor, of April freshness dashed with tears of tender sorrow, that seemed to melt away the bitterness, the hard indifference, which had congealed his spirit of later years. But under her temporary lightness was an undertone of profound sadness; and after laughing sympathetically at some reminiscence of old Hedwig's tyranny, her face would quickly resume its pensive expression, her eyes their far-away look.

"But I haven't seen your work yet," she said suddenly; and rising, she began to walk slowly round while Leyton put aside the not too steady tea table.

"What a quantity of fighting and Oriental subjects," she said at length. "I do not care for them very much. That man there, praying against those bars of vivid crimson and yellow light in the sky is very good—oh, very; you feel that he *is* praying, not merely saying prayers! And Jack, *this* is lovely, these autumn woods on the bank of the lake or river so still and deep, with the brown and golden leaves that have fallen on the water; one almost feels the air with the scent of the trees upon it. Where is that delightful place, Jack?"

"I do not think that exact locality exists, Myra. I have mixed two or three to produce it."

"I could look at it for hours. I wish—how I wish I might even draw with you Jack."

She took up a piece of chalk with a murmured "May I?" sat down by a table on which lay a sheet of gray paper, and began to copy a group of trees which stood on a smaller easel.

Leyton watched her for some minutes.

"Good!" he said at last. "You have a good broad

style, an expressive touch. I wish I could teach you, Myra; but it is quite out of the question."

"I am so sorry. I only meant now, while the holidays last."

"Just so," returned Leyton abruptly.

"Very well," said Myra humbly; then turning to another newly begun sketch, "this will be pretty."

"Yes; it is a bit of Hampstead Heath, quite near;" then with a sudden impulse he exclaimed, "by the way, if you would care to sketch it, you could join me there of an afternoon. I will tell you where we can meet."

"If I care!" cried Myra, clasping her hands. "It would be only too delightful."

"Then to-morrow, about 3.30, meet me at the London Road Station, and I'll pilot you. Never mind pencil or paper; I'll manage all that. Have you ever tried water-colors?"

"Oh, yes. I have dabbled in everything long ago."

"Well, try chalk this time, just to get your hand in."

"It will be *himmelisch*," cried Myra.

"Now look here. This is the sketch of your father I did nearly six years ago."

"Ah-h-h!" a long drawn ah, as Myra stood with clasped hands before it; then she sank into a chair.

Leyton saw that her eyes were full of tears, and her lips were trembling.

"I hope to Heaven she won't have a fit of crying;" he thought. But she struggled gallantly for self-mastery.

"You like it?" asked Leyton at last.

"It is a treasure," she said.

"I will copy it on a smaller scale for you. Now Myra, I will walk back with you; your visit has given me so much pleasure."

"And to me," murmured Myra, holding out her hand to him.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

SUMMER of the year of grace in which the events here recorded took place was wet, dull, and unseasonable, but when August came Nature seemed to be tired of the sulks, and smiled upon her saddened subjects.

It was a delicious month, sunny, without being sultry; full of rich color, with just the faintest crisp touch in the air to make exercise a joy, and the atmosphere light and clear.

It was perfect weather for sketching, and once more, after the long spell of gray cloud and misty sorrow that had shaded her young days, Myra felt that existence was a joy; that to breathe, to look, to listen were each a blessing. In this expansive mood she felt obliged to show her work to cook, failing any other critic, for her good friend Mrs. Keene had been suddenly summoned to Dover, where her husband had met with a very inconvenient accident. Stepping from the gangway on to the pier, his hands full of parcels, some sudden movement of the boat (for it was a rough day) made him lose his balance. He fell, his right foot catching in the rope which secured the gangway, and sprained his ankle severely. His wife had some difficulty in conveying him to his own home, and Myra felt it was as well to refrain from her accustomed visits.

Cook admired the sketches immensely, and was of opinion that they were worth money.

"If you can do the like of that, miss, you might do better than staying on here," said that sage counselor.

"Oh, I ought to have a great deal more teaching before I could earn any money! I should not have done half so well if Mr. Leyton had not helped me—the gentleman who came to see me, you know."

"H'oh!" said the cook. "Well, it *is* nice to be taught;" and she paused abruptly, leaving the impression on Myra's

mind that, for some mysterious reason, she did not quite approve of these lessons.

This did not, however, affect her spirits, and she started with her usual alacrity to meet Leyton at their very unromantic trysting place. From the Hampstead Heath Station it was a pleasant walk to the spot Leyton had selected, and the new old friends were sufficiently sympathetic to enjoy each other's companionship even when silent, as they often were.

They had worked together nearly every day for a week, and Leyton was a good deal struck by the natural taste and ability displayed by his companion.

"I had a letter from Mrs. Keene the day before yesterday," said Myra suddenly, when after pointing out some faults in her work, he had resumed his own. "What did she write about?"

"To tell me that Mr. Keene had met with an accident. He sprained his ankle, and she has gone down to Dover to nurse him."

"Ah, indeed! by the way, was he not traveling with Lady Shirland and her daughter?"

"Yes."

"Are they in town?"

"I do not know."

"I must find out. Lady Shirland is some sort of remote connection of mine. She is very good-natured."

"Is she?" said Myra indifferently.

"I should like you to know her."

"Why?" asked Myra, "she would not care to know *me*!"

"How do you know?" asked Leyton; and there was a brief silence while he worked in some shadows, and then contemplated the effect. "The fact is," he resumed, "you ought to know more women—only women can be of use to you."

"How is that, Jack? No woman could teach me to draw as well as you do; that is really being of use."

"I wish I could be of more use to you, Myra, but—I may not be here—I think of going—somewhere in the winter."

"The winter? that is a long way off; so do not talk of it now. Jack, I wish you would not go. It is cruel to have found just *one* friend and then to lose him."

"Have I grown such a fatherly old buffer that she talks in this way to me?" thought Leyton, stealing a glance at the delicately rounded cheek and small ear next to him. "So much the better. It makes these lessons possible, only they must not go on too long."

"You know," he said aloud, "we brothers of the brush must go after the light—there is no light to be had in winter in London."

"I know that," returned Myra sighing.

"What I thought of respecting Lady Shirland is this: she has a daughter, a step-daughter, rather, who is an invalid and full of whims. She plays a little, sings a little, paints a little—does a little of everything. Suppose she took a fancy to you and asked to be her companion—to play, and draw, and sing with her—it——"

"I should not like it at all," said Myra.

"It would surely be a better and easier life than that of a teacher in a school?"

"I am not so sure," reflectively. "My work at school will at least be clearly defined; then, I shall not remain there."

"Where do you think of going, Myra?" with surprise. "What wild scheme have you in your head?"

"I cannot tell you yet, I have only a glimpse of something."

"Do you not care to confide in me?"

"I have nothing to confide yet. I shall tell you when I have, if you are not far away."

The composure of her tone surprised him. He expected to see her blue eyes full of tears at the prospect of losing him; not that Leyton was a conceited jackanapes, but her manner had been so confiding, her pleasure in his society so frankly displayed, he had begun to fear that the prospect of his absence would have been a terrible blow. So she had a strain of independent life beneath her soft, innocent seeming.

"It is very hard for a girl to carry out any plan unassisted, Myra, and you must not throw away substance for a shadow."

"I am not easily frightened," she returned with a sigh. "You see I have only myself to think of—I am quite alone."

"Well, if I can arrange with Lady Shirland to come to my studio, you will not refuse to meet her and Miss Brown?"

"Oh, no, if they are friends of yours and you wish it!"

"Yes, I do, particularly; but I am not sure if they are in town. I must find out."

"Thank you," said Myra, and a long pause ensued.

Leyton was meditating on the glimpse he had caught of Myra's inner self; it made him vaguely uneasy. Independence and individuality were dangerous qualities in a girl situated as she was. Self-distrust and timidity would be safer ingredients.

"Would you like to study seriously? to try to be an artist?" he asked presently.

"It would be enchanting, but I know enough to know I have no really great gift, and how could I live while I studied?"

"You might do landscape well, and there is a market for landscape."

Myra did not reply; she sat looking at her work, and then began to put her pencils in their case.

"Yes," said Leyton, noticing the movement, "the light has changed; we had better be going. How much longer do the holidays last?"

"About a fortnight; at least mine will be at an end then, for Mrs. Fairchild comes back, and I shall not be able to go out."

"Then we had better make hay while the sun shines; but I shall be engaged to-morrow. The day after we might try that clump of trees in the hollow; I have done nearly all I want to this study. It is difficult to get the effect of foliage. I suppose you have never studied the human figure?"

"Never. I used to do heads with my father, and I loved them."

They had put their traps together and were walking homeward.

"It is so fine that we might walk all the way if it would not be too much for you."

"Too much for me? Oh, I can walk miles!"

"You don't look as if you could," said Leyton, letting his eyes dwell upon her with the kindly compassionate expression she always found there. "I should not say you were strong."

"I am always well, Jack, but I generally grow very tired when I walk with tiresome people."

"Thank you," said Leyton with a smile. "I am glad you do not consider me a bore."

"You! Oh, you are delightful, at least to me; other people might not think so; but you only remind me of happy days, and you are very good."

"I am afraid your view of this subject is quite original, Myra. Tell me, do you like any of the books I sent you?"

"Yes; the essays are charming, and the stories, they make me envious, for every one of them ends so happily, and the good people are rewarded."

"Why, you young skeptic, do you think there is no joy, no justice in real life? Perhaps this time next year may see you radiant with happiness and filled with content."

"Do you think that likely, Jack?"

"Likely! I cannot say; but to a young creature like you—how old are you, nineteen?—all things are possible."

"Ah!" said Myra, and stopped, her eyes full of tears, her lips quivering.

"For God's sake don't cry!" exclaimed Leyton abruptly. "You don't know the effect tears—your tears—would have upon me. It is all so cruel."

"No; I will not!" she returned, startled out of her melting mood by his sudden vehemence. "It is cowardly and foolish! Does not some English poet say 'To bear is to conquer one's fate'?"

"Yes; but the advice is seldom acted on."

There was a pause, then Leyton started another topic, and they found the road back to Ruby Lodge amazingly short.

The next day Leyton walked across the parks to Caterham Gardens to inquire for Lady Shirland and her daughter. He found they had only rested in London for three days, previous to traveling north, and were not expected back for some time.

Help in that quarter, therefore, was for the present out of the question. Leyton was a good deal exercised on the subject of his old friend's daughter. There was not in the world a more desolate creature, and she evidently was afflicted with that almost fatal combination, a loving heart and an independent spirit. He sat long after his solitary dinner in the very commonplace lodging he occupied near his studio, and thought earnestly and painfully of the lonely waif who had so unexpectedly crossed his path.

"I am just the very most useless friend she could have!" he thought, "and I would give anything to serve her. I haven't a character for steadiness, and I have grown so infernally cross-grained that I am not exactly popular. Would it be wisest and kindest to leave her to her fate? I might make a horrible hash of it all if I meddle, and do her more harm than good. I'm not old enough to be fatherly, and I am too poor to marry, even if I felt inclined to commit that folly, which I am not. I don't suppose I can ever feel true ideal sentimental love again, and yet I am afraid the touch of her dainty hands, the trusting sweetness of her eyes, might stir the electricity that now lies sleeping in a way I am ashamed to think of; and she, poor child! friendless as she is, might learn to love even a rugged fellow like myself, and then, and then, I doubt if I should thank her for it; we are all inclined to be horribly cruel to women who give us unsought love! No! by Heaven! I'll do the right thing, and do it before it is too hard to be done! we are drifting already. How long is it since I met her in that unlucky hotel? Barely a month. I must go out once more to that bit of elysium up on the heath, and then unflinchingly cut short this pretty idyl. I'll go away and stay away till this infernal school is in full swing; but I will try to interest Lady Shirland in Myra; *she* could be a very useful friend to her if she liked. Yes, I must put an end to this platonic affair, or it will solve itself in a different fashion."

So thinking, he drew over a sketching-block, and began to draw his young pupil in an attitude that was specially stamped upon his mind, standing, her face turned from him and showing the graceful throat and ear, and part of the delicate chin. He had sketched this more than once, though he steadily refrained from putting her features on canvas or paper. Then he sat long in deep thought, resting his head on his hand, while the magic lantern of memory placed picture after picture before his eyes.

Leyton's life had been rather a failure in many ways, and to himself a profound disappointment. The younger son of a good family, he had gone into the Indian cavalry, and as long as there was anything like active service to be done, he did well. An unemployed season or two, and a tyrannical martinet colonel, who was always harrassing his

officers about petty details, made him thoroughly disgusted with the life he had chosen. About this time a certain officer of artillery chose to retire on account of health, and departed for England with his fascinating wife, for whom Leyton had formed one of those profound, passionate attachments of which few men or women are capable. He threw up his commission, followed them to London, and took up art as his future calling. He had decided ability, and in order to study he established himself at Munich, a favorite place with Colonel——, who was a bit of a connoisseur, a German scholar in a small way, and a *soi-disant* philosopher of the needles and pins kind, who generally managed to scratch whatever hand attempted to stroke him. Being blessed with an exalted opinion of himself, and a decided disregard for everyone else, it was not difficult to evade his perception, so the lovers were enabled to enjoy many happy hours with safety and a due regard to appearances.

This was a halcyon time indeed. Leyton made immense progress in his art; it seemed to him that he could conquer the world! He succeeded in getting a picture admitted to the Salon, and another into the Royal Academy. Though he had been anything but careful, some of his capital still remained to him. All was bright when one day, rather suddenly, his lady-love's husband died, leaving his widow fairly well off, but by no means abundantly provided for. This happy event, as Leyton considered it, seemed to have removed the only barrier to his complete happiness. Now they could belong to each other in the face of society. Alas! before fifteen months were over, Leyton's adored mistress was the wife of a wealthy citizen of famous London town.

She was very tender and touching in her explanations. It was impossible for her to face poverty; she had had a miserably sordid existence, and she must emancipate herself from it; besides, she did not wish to cripple her dear Jack! Then their charming friendship might be renewed later and——

To Jack Leyton it seemed as if hell had yawned before him. Moralists might justly shake their heads at his past life; but to him the woman he loved had degraded herself below the reach of love, beyond the possibility of redemption. Chaos was indeed come again, and for a while despair

and disillusion dragged him down to depths he had never before touched.

Meantime, the woman who had wrecked his life floated triumphantly upward, secure in her discarded lover's chivalrous silence.

At last, time and work, as the war correspondent and artist to an illustrated paper, helped him to bridge the gulf that parted the present from the past. Bruised and maimed in heart and mind, travel-stained and torn by the brambles and briars and mud through which he had dragged himself, he began to struggle back into the ranks he had for a while forsaken.

For him Myra had a double interest—as the daughter of a man for whom he had had a warm regard, and because she was associated with the glorious days when he dwelt in “The Venusberg”—before he was so unwillingly emancipated from the soul-destroying spell.

Myra used the “off” day on which Leyton was engaged to call at Mrs. Keene’s hotel, and found she was expected to return with her invalid husband that evening. Mr. Keene was progressing as well as could be expected, the chamber-maid informed her. Miss Wilhelmina was still away, and not expected for a day or two. So Myra walked back, cheerfully thinking of to-morrow, and persuading herself to write to Mrs. Fairchild for the key of one of the pianos. She might as well practise to fill up her time.

The next morning brought a note from Leyton postponing their appointment to the following day, and informing her that inexorable business would probably call him out of town next week.

Myra grew cold as she read, and yet the terrible announcement did not surprise her. After the severe schooling through which she had passed, it seemed impossible that blue skies and sunshine could ever last. Had this blissful interlude continued longer it would only intensify the bitterness of its ending! Besides, she had no right to trouble Jack Leyton; she was accustomed to be looked upon as a burden—an unnecessary item for whom there was scarcely a place in this crowded stage. So she must not murmur at the inevitable nor strive to hold what was fated to slip from her grasp.

But in spite of her philosophy she wept long and bitterly through the silence of a sleepless night, and looked so pale and wan the following day, that cook improvised a basin of broth in the forenoon, and insisted that Myra should swallow the larger part of it.

The fates were against her, poor child, for the weather changed, and a week of rain and storm set in, which forbade all plans for sketching, and reduced her to the profoundest depression.

Leyton himself did not feel particularly cheerful. He missed Myra's companionship more than he expected, but this sense of loss made him more resolute to resist the temptation of indulging in it. He was rather surprised that she had not answered his note, and he certainly could not leave London without seeing her. So one wild, damp afternoon, when the wind was shaking down the sere and yellow leaves into the puddles and mud, he arrived at Ruby Lodge, and was admitted by the front door.

Myra was not in the room when he entered, and he felt a little anxious, even nervous, lest she should look miserable, and perhaps shed tears. She certainly looked very white when she did come, but she smiled brightly, and her eyes were clear and calm.

"It is very good of you to come! I was afraid you would go away without seeing me," she said, giving him her small cold hand.

"I could not have gone away without seeing you, Myra! I assure you, I have missed my pupil sorely! But the clerk of the weather has shut up the school. I fancy we are having the equinox unusually early."

"Perhaps! at all events I am glad to see you again to thank you for some happy days—they will be pleasant to think about—for one can always keep a memory to rest one's eyes upon."

Leyton did not answer directly, but after a brief pause, took up a small parcel he had laid on the table, and handing it to Myra, said:

"This is the copy of your father's picture which I promised you. I am afraid I have lost the likeness a little."

Myra's eyes sparkled as she hastily undid the paper in which it was folded, and uttered an exclamation of pleasure as they fell upon it.

"Perhaps it is a shade less like than your original sketch, but oh! it *is* good, it is his own dear face." She stopped. He could see her teeth pressed upon her under lip in the effort to maintain her composure.

"You have given me a treasure," she said, holding out her hand to him with a gracious yet dignified gesture, as soon as she could command her voice.

Leyton took it in both his own, and obeying an irresistible impulse, kissed it gently. "I wish I could be a more useful friend to you, Myra! but it is not easy for a poor Bohemian artist, like myself, to be of much use to anyone. You want women friends, and no doubt you will make them. Remember, Myra, that whenever you are in any real difficulty you must not hesitate to send for me! I will do all and everything in my power to help you, and I shall always keep you informed as to where I am to be found. I suppose I may write to you? your letters are not opened?"

"My letters, oh! I never have any. No, I do to think anyone would interfere with them. I am a teacher now."

"True, I had forgotten your dignified position. Then I will let you know what I am about from time to time, and you must answer!"

"Of course, I shall! But, Jack, you ought to be a *great* artist. There is something in your pictures I cannot quite put into words. Something more than real looking trees, and water, and distance; they tell a story—they tell of joy or sorrow, or anger or despair. Oh, I cannot quite say what I want."

"You say it remarkably well," returned Jack, smiling, "and you rouse my ambition, which has been dead, or sleeping."

"Do not let it sleep! Oh! how delighted I should be to read about you in the papers! I used to see long critiques in the papers at Uncle Edward's about painting and music and theaters."

"Well, Myra, I will do my best! I suppose I may come and see you when I return?"

"Oh, yes! when will that be?"

"I am not sure; a couple of months. Here is my address for about three weeks. It is on the west coast of Scotland."

"Thank you! you *have* been good to me! If I never see you again, I shall always remember you with pleasure."

The large dark blue eyes he admired looked yearningly into his.

"Not see me again!" exclaimed Leyton. "Why, of course you shall. You shall not get rid of me so easily."

Myra laughed. "I do not want to get rid of you, Jack."

"And your breathing space will soon be over?"

"Yes! but I am not sorry; there will be plenty to do, and on the whole the girls are not unkind; none of them care much about me, except two of the little ones, but they are merry and they amuse me. I shall be so proud to show them the sketches I did with you."

It was on Leyton's lips to say, "Don't mention the matter," but looking in her face he paused, and decided to risk anything rather than suggest the faintest necessity for concealment.

"I have tied up all the books you lent me, and was going to leave them at your studio, but the weather has been so bad."

"Yes—yes, of course; I will take them with me now, and I must go, Myra!"

"I suppose so! good-by! Be very ambitious and then you will be very successful. Good-by!"

Leyton held her hand for a moment between his own two; but he resisted the inclination to kiss it again.

"Good-by, Myra," he said softly, and taking the parcel of books he went away.

Myra stood for some minutes where he had left her, her hands clasped, her lip quivering; then she brushed the moisture from her eyes, sat down, and, drawing her father's portrait to her, tenderly kissed the dear familiar face.

Leyton walked rapidly toward his own abode. "That's well ended," he thought, "but there's more in her than I thought! she was calmer, and far less moved than I was. I have alarmed myself unnecessarily. I am an old friend to her and nothing more. Yet, it is wiser and better to get away. There is more strength in her than could be expected from that gentle, willowy creature. I think Lady Shirland would take to her; as to the adorable Dorothea, it is impossible to say what she might do—establish a tyrannical protectorate over the sweet waif, or hate her like poison. Most women are inexplicable. Even Myra may not be the angel she seems! I should like to have the chance of studying her character. I fancy there are tangled skeins in it; but it would be better not, much better not."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

THE remainder of the holidays was a neutral-tinted blank to Myra.

The gleam of sunshine that had brightened her dreary path for a moment had faded, and all was leaden colored and misty again, yet she did not absolutely mope. To let herself think—when thought only convinced her that “a smile and a grasp of the hand hastening on,” was all she could hope for, of intercourse with her father’s friend, the one creature associated with the dear bygone days—was intolerable. She must be “doing” to keep herself mentally free from pain. Moreover, the lesson her isolated existence had cut deep into her heart was, that she had no claim on anyone, that she must trust to herself and trouble no one. There were times when this cruel knowledge pressed its sting painfully into her soul; then the blessed buoyancy of youth floated her up over these depths, for “there’s a time when hope deceives us, and we dream of bright days to come.” Persistent, unrelieved melancholy can only end in the madhouse.

The cook found among the keys confided to her care one which unlocked a piano, so Myra found some diversion in trying all the music she could lay her hands on, also in visiting Mrs. Keene, and conversing with the disabled courier, who seemed to Myra’s inexperience a very well-bred, accomplished person.

It was pleasant, too, to converse with his granddaughter, a girl somewhat younger than herself.

Her father had been Keene’s only son by his first marriage. She had lost both parents, but they were well replaced by her adoring grandfather and step-grandmother, who had no children of her own.

These occupations, added to needlework, kept her busy till Mrs. Fairchild’s return set the machinery of the

establishment going, and made Myra think at times that the delightful interlude of her renewed acquaintance with Leyton was the baseless fabric of a dream.

Mrs. Fairchild returned in improved health, and consequently in improved temper, though on the whole she was of wonderfully even temperament. The end of the term, however, might well ruffle the equanimity of a whole angelic choir. Then she was to reopen with all her old and three new pupils, and she flattered herself that her arrangement with Myra was not a bad stroke of business.

It was nearly a week after her return before Mrs. Fairchild had time for any conversation with the young German teacher on personal matters.

"You are still looking very pale and thin, Miss Dallas," she said, darting a sharp glance at her as they sat together after their frugal supper. "I trust and hope you are not going to knock up at the beginning of the term! It would put me out dreadfully."

"I feel quite strong, I assure you, Mrs. Fairchild! and I have enjoyed my holidays, for I did some sketching up at Hampstead. May I show you what I have done?"

"Yes! fetch me your work."

Myra obeyed.

"It isn't bad for that style," said Mrs. Fairchild carelessly, "but it doesn't bear close inspection. How did you manage; you did not go and sit on the heath alone?"

"Oh! no. I met a gentleman, an old friend of my father's, an artist whom I used to know long ago, and as he was making some sketches himself, he let me work beside him."

"A gentleman? was he an old gentleman?" sharply.

"No, not old; younger than my father, and——"

"Why, Miss Dallas, this was rather imprudent," interrupted Mrs. Fairchild. "Pray what sort of man is he? what's his name?"

"He is very nice indeed, and very kind. He knew me when I was a child; his name is Leyton. He is tall and rather dark, and I'm sure I don't know how old he is—perhaps thirty or forty."

"That is a very vague statement! I think your own sense of propriety might have suggested the presence of another lady?"

"But I never dreamed of wanting anyone else! What harm could there be in going with Jack Leyton?"

"Don't, *pray* don't, Miss Dallas!" cried the outraged schoolmistress, with a shiver of horror. "Do not name any man with such appalling familiarity! You distress me greatly. Imagine any of our neighbors seeing you walk off conantly with a dissipated (they are *all* dissipated) young man. What a character they would give of you and of my house. Why it is enough to injure my establishment, my prospects, my——"

"But, Mrs. Fairchild, how could that be?" interrupted Myra, opening her eyes with astonishment. "Jack—Mr. Leyton is a gentleman, and very good to me, and an old friend. What harm could there be in——?"

"Myra Dallas," solemnly, "if your own rectitude and sense of propriety does not suggest a true view of the case, no words of mine can enlighten you."

Myra was silent with astonishment for a minute.

"Nothing could persuade me that it is wrong to sit and sketch beside an old friend," she said very quietly at length. "But if you disapprove, of course I shall not do it again, nor is it likely I can, for Mr. Leyton has gone away to Scotland, and I do not know when he will return."

"So much the better!" ejaculated Mrs. Fairchild; "your upbringing has evidently been most defective; but if you undertake to be guided by me I shall say no more about this deplorable indiscretion! You are not a bad girl, Myra, but quite incapable of seeing the true aspect of things. Now I am going to make up my books, so you may go to your room if you like."

And Myra went, with fresh food for thought, for painful wonder. What strange doctrine was this propounded by Mrs. Fairchild? It was too ridiculous; she (Myra) would ask Jack when they met again, if anyone save Mrs. Fairchild herself could see wrong-doing in so simple an act as a lady and gentleman walking and sketching together. Suddenly she felt her cheeks aflame; could she ask Jack this question? No! she dare not; the bloom of fresh innocence that thinks no evil had been rudely brushed away, so infinitely more suggestive are the fig-leaves of propriety than the noble nakedness of simple humanity.

Without distinctly thinking through the uncomfortable

puzzle, Myra felt that an impalpable, yet most perceptible barrier had been raised between Leyton and herself. "It is really no matter," was her final conclusion. "I don't suppose I shall ever see much of him again."

Ruby Lodge was itself again, and the routine of work was in full swing. Myra was soon very busy, for besides her German class, Mrs. Fairchild found heaps of small services which were no one's particular duty, for Myra to perform, nor did she object. She hoped she was growing more alert and practical, she was less frequently reproached for "dreaming" and "mooning" then she used to be, and had decidedly increased in popularity with the girls.

It was a damp drizzling day at the end of October, and somewhat late in the afternoon. Myra had been directing the practise of a rather backward music pupil in the lower school-room, and thought she had heard the sound of a cab stopping, but took little heed, as she ascended to her own tiny chamber, intending to devote a spare half-hour to some necessary darning, when the parlor-maid almost startled her out of her wits by presenting her with a card.

"Mrs. Edward Dallas; will you see the lady, miss?"

"No! yes! perhaps I had better," hesitated Myra.

"She is in the drawing-room, miss."

Myra turned and went somewhat slowly to that state apartment. What fresh stab was her uncle's widow going to inflict?

When she entered she found Mrs. Dallas standing on the hearth-rug, her eyes fixed upon the door.

"Ah, Myra!" she exclaimed, coming to meet her, both hands outstretched, "you are no doubt surprised to see me. You will be still more surprised when I tell you why!"

Amazed at the change in her aunt's voice, manner, expression, Myra could not speak, but silently gave her hands to those so eagerly extended.

"I have come to ask your forgiveness, Myra, for what must have seemed my unaccountable harshness; to explain that I have suspected you wrongfully, and to endeavor to atone for the past."

"I *am* greatly surprised! Indeed, I never did anything to deserve your dislike!" said Myra, gazing at her not without distrust.

"I know you did not—I know it now; but for a long time I believed you had made sad mischief between your uncle and myself. Let me tell you all about it." She sat down on the sofa, and drew Myra to her side, holding her hand while she spoke, her eyes growing moist as if from suppressed feeling.

"You will remember, no doubt, the sudden change in my manner and conduct toward you about a year and a half ago—the last time you spent any holidays with us?"

Myra thought hard, but in vain. Mrs. Dallas had been always much the same.

"I cannot quite remember," she said hesitatingly, "but I am not very observant."

"You are a singularly guileless creature, Myra! Alas, I remember the time but too well. It was then that I had the only misunderstanding with my dear husband which ever arose between us! He broke out into reproaches against me one evening, accusing me of unkindness and injustice to *you*, and much more. I will not dwell upon the cruel details, enough to say that I believed you had incited him to this outbreak, as he had been to see you that very day. I confess to being greatly embittered against you, and determined you should never reside under my roof."

"Of course you did! but I never said a word," began Myra.

"I know you did not. Just listen, my dear! Searching through my dear husband's papers I discovered, only yesterday, two or three letters addressed to him by a bad, cruel woman, now dead, who hated me, and would stop at nothing to injure me and separate me from my husband. In these letters I found all the accusations which your uncle made against me. This was the reason of his attack upon me; and you, toward whom I have been so harsh, so unjust, are innocent!" She let go Myra's hand to press her handkerchief to her eyes.

"How dreadfully wicked!" ejaculated her hearer; "but how *could* you believe I would make my poor uncle uncomfortable. He was so fond of you!"

"Ah! he was indeed! and I have been so unkind to his favorite niece! Can you forgive me, Myra? Oh! can you forgive me?"

"Oh, yes! I can indeed! I am so glad you have dis-

covered the truth. I never could make out why you did not like me, and I don't think you did from the first!"

"You are mistaken, Myra! I used to be hurt by your coldness and shyness—that would have passed away but for the work of the base mischief-maker! Now, my dear child, my most ardent desire is to atone for my past unkindness; you must come and live with me, and be my daughter. I am terribly lonely, Myra! Lionel is so much sought that I scarcely see him, and now when the years grow long and wearisome, you must come and cheer me up—you must return good for evil."

"Do you really mean it?" exclaimed Myra, somewhat puzzled, and not too ready to accept this offer; a sort of fear that some other discovery might again change the present radiant state of affairs made her less effusively grateful than Mrs. Dallas expected.

"Ah!" she cried, "I see you cannot forgive me; the sense of my unkindness still rankles."

"No! indeed it does not. If you really care for my company I am sure you are welcome to it! but I am afraid Mrs. Fairchild will not like me to leave till Christmas, and I should not like to displease her, for she has been kind to me in her way."

"Till Christmas! Oh, nonsense! she must not be selfish. I shall settle about that!"

"I know it is not easy to find a German teacher, and——"

"I cannot have you roughing it here to suit Mrs. Fairchild's convenience," interrupted Mrs. Dallas. "Not, indeed, that I have a very luxurious home to offer you, dear Myra—my means are limited since my dear husband's death. Still, you shall have a tiny room all to yourself, and as comfortable as I can make it, and I shall be so glad to hear you play and sing, or read——" She talked on in the same strain for a few minutes, while Myra felt inclined to pinch herself to test her wakefulness—it all seemed so like a strange, contradictory dream.

"The sooner I see Mrs. Fairchild the better," her aunt was saying when Myra succeeded in convincing herself she was awake.

"I will go for her, aunt—shall I come back?"

"Yes, if you like."

"You see, I do not want to put her out."

"You are very considerate of Mrs. Fairchild, Myra! perhaps you would prefer staying with her?"

"Yesterday I should," returned Myra. "To-day things are changed;" and she left the room.

Mrs. Dallas leaned back in the corner of the sofa and heaved a deep sigh; then a look of quiet, contented thought stole over her handsome dark face, and she remained profoundly still, meditating on some deeply interesting subject, till Mrs. Fairchild, followed by Myra, came in.

A brisk discussion ensued between the two elder ladies, Mrs. Fairchild being very reluctant to let Myra go, and apparently greatly puzzled by Mrs. Dallas's change of mood.

As to the slight explanation offered by the latter, which of course did not include the particulars related to Myra, Mrs. Fairchild scarcely attended to it. She evidently considered the whole a mere whim, and even ventured in very plain terms to call Mrs. Dallas's attention to the fact that in removing Myra from an occupation which would enable her to earn her bread, she incurred the responsibility of providing for her.

"I am quite aware of it," returned Mrs. Dallas loftily.

Finally, as Myra stuck loyally to her engagement, it was agreed that Mrs. Fairchild should look out diligently for a German governess, and as soon as one was found Myra should be permitted to take up her abode with her affectionate and penitent aunt. In any case she was to be free at Christmas.

For the first time in the course of their acquaintance Mrs. Dallas kissed Myra at parting.

"And I may call you aunt now?" asked the latter, as she accompanied that lady to the door.

"That is an unkind little speech, Myra. Yes, of course you may! The reason I wished to break with you is removed, and I am but too glad to have a relative of my dear husband near me. Remember, you are to spend Sunday with me! Be sure you come early; we shall discuss all our plans at leisure."

Myra was almost stunned by this extraordinary change in the face of affairs, and thankful when she could think over the matter in the silence and darkness of her own room.

Really Mrs. Dallas was very kind. Of course it was but natural that she should be irritated against her (Myra) when

she thought her a mean mischief-maker! If Mrs. Dallas continued pleasant and friendly, it would be far nicer to live with her than at school, and Myra resolved to be bright and complaisant, and grateful too. But she rather wished that Lionel was not to be of the party. She did not like Lionel. At one time she had rather liked him, but she felt an odd sort of fear of his eyes, which was, she told herself, very foolish.

The more Myra thought of this curious turn in the current of her life, the more content she felt. It was quite likely that a woman of strong, quick feeling like Mrs. Dallas, in her anxiety to atone for past injustice, might grow to love where she first disliked, and Myra as quite ready to give affection freely in return for any bestowed on herself. Life might be happy enough with her aunt, as she began again to call her in her own mind, and perhaps a brighter period as about to dawn for her.

One duty she readily fulfilled, for a duty it seemed; that was to write an account of this important event to Jack Leyton.

He would be so pleased, for he had been especially anxious she should have women friends, and what better position could she find than a home with a female relative, no connection—like Mrs. Dallas.

This letter brought a swift reply. Leyton was delighted, in fact, overjoyed to find his friend and pupil was to be so happily relieved from the difficulties of her isolated position. "Mrs. Dallas ought to be a warm friend," he continued, "now she found out how she has misjudged you, for she certainly was a bitter foe as far as I can gather. Pray let me know where you are to be found, as I should like to see you, and make your aunt's acquaintance when I return to town."

To her good friend Mrs. Keene Myra explained the new condition of things by word of mouth, and gladly received the congratulations of the worthy couple.

"It is a pity Mrs. Dallas didn't speak out straight when she began to think you had made mischief," said Mrs. Keene reflectively. "If she had just given you a piece of her mind you might have cleared yourself, but it's not often her sort goes quite straight."

"What *do* you mean?" cried Myra. "You must not say

anything against my aunt, now that we are going to be friends, and she wishes to be good to me!"

"Well I'm not blaming her, Miss Myra! only you know it's harder for one of them half-castes to act square than for a real Englishwoman."

"Half-caste? *was* she a half-caste?"

"Yes, missee. Her father was an Englishman and her mother a native woman. You may see it in her finger-nails. I've heard her ladyship speak of her when she told me as how the colonel had brought you back from Munich."

"Oh! well, I don't want to know anything about her now she is kind. I used to hate her; but that was because she wounded me. Now I know she thought me an ungrateful wretch I can forgive her, and I feel all the happier."

"You are right, Miss Myra, only don't offend her, or go too much against her—she might change round again."

"Pray do not prophesy evil!" cried Myra. "Of course I shall like her and be nice to her."

"All I am afraid of is she will not let you come and see us. She is rather high and haughty, and when first I went to ask to see you she spoke to me as if I were dirt; so maybe she won't like you to come."

"Oh! but I will—I am not going to be a slave."

"I hope not, my dear! but we'll see!"

Mrs. Dallas was an energetic woman. She had undertaken to assist Mrs. Fairechild in her search for a governess to fill Myra's place, and she did not let the grass grow under her feet. She hunted scholastic offices, answered advertisements, wrote, and rambled from post to pillow till she discovered the desired article early in December. The question of the Christmas vacation arose, and finally it was arranged that Myra should be emancipated a week before that festival, and her successor come in a week after. So Myra bade adieu to Ruby Lodge, not without kindly regret.

It was indeed strange to be installed in her aunt's home as a favored inmate—to be not only warmly received, but to be treated with marked consideration.

"I have only a tiny bedroom to give you, dear!" said Mrs. Dallas, as she led the way upstairs, after Myra's one trunk, which was being carried by a six-penny volunteer, under the inspection of Mrs. Dwyer. "But by and bye,

when I know better what I can venture to do, you shall have more comfortable quarters."

"It is quite as good as I want, and it is larger than the one I had at Ruby Lodge."

"When you unpack your things I shall put away your box—that will give you more room. Lionel desired me to say he hopes you will excuse him, but he is obliged to dine out to-day."

"Oh! of course, he need not mind me. It would never do to stand on ceremony with a member of the family as I am to be."

"It is very nice and sensible of you, dear, to say so. I always thought you a sensible girl. I hope, now that you are with me, Lionel will stay more at home. He is too fond of society; perhaps, as he is out, we might do with tea and eggs—we women care so little what we eat."

"Eggs and tea are delicious," explained Myra joyously, charmed with the warmth and kindness of her aunt's manner.

"A dinner of herbs where love is, is not to be despised," said Mrs. Dallas, with a gentle smile. "I will leave you to unpack. You have really very pretty hair, Myra," as she removed her hat. "We will have our tea-dinner at six; by the way, Lionel is dining with great friends of mine—Lady Shirland and her daughter, or rather step-daughter—Miss Dorothea Browne, a very charming girl, with a large fortune. I think my dear boy is greatly taken with her, nor is she averse to him. I am sure you believe I am not mercenary, but Lionel has no fortune, and if a nice, amiable girl *with* one is willing to marry him, why, it would be a great relief to my mind."

"I suppose so! I heard of Lady Shirland some little time ago from a gentleman who knows her very well!"

"A gentleman?" repeated Mrs. Dallas, a hundred notes of admiration and interrogation in her voice.

"Yes, an old friend of my father's," returned Myra with happy unconsciousness, taking off her jacket and laying it on the bed, "Mr. Leyton. He used to study with my father when I was a little girl of thirteen or fourteen. We met by accident, and he very kindly came to see me, and gave me a lesson or two in sketching. I dare say he will call here when he comes back to town."

"But, good Heavens! how does he know where to find you?"

"I wrote and told him. He was so distressed about my not having any home, that I told him how good you were to me."

"Ha! and asked him to call?" said Mrs. Dallas, looking into her eyes as though she would read her soul.

"Oh, no. I should not think of troubling him, but he asked *me* to let him know where I should be."

Mrs. Dallas looked down for a moment in silence, and then said in a slightly constrained tone:

"Of course, dear, I shall be pleased to see any friend of yours; but young ladies rarely make the acquaintance of gentlemen without a proper introduction."

"Well, Jack Leyton was introduced to me by my poor dear father!" returned Myra, with a sigh and a smile.

"True!" said Mrs. Dallas amiably. "You will come down dear, when you are ready;" and she left the room.

The evening passed pleasantly. Mrs. Dallas asked Myra to play, and seemed to enjoy the music. She was not in the habit of reading, nor did she care for needlework, unless, indeed, she fabricated a lace fichu, or trimmed a dainty bonnet, and her taste, though tending to brilliant colors, was good. Dress and jewels were her idols; she also loved luxury in every shape, though quite capable of abstemiousness in all directions were she obliged to pay for the luxury herself. She had a certain sense of enjoyment in music, and would sit and dream while Myra's fingers strayed over the keys.

That first evening Lionel did not appear, and Myra's first interview with him took place at breakfast next morning. Mrs. Dallas always had her coffee in bed, so for half an hour Lionel and Myra were *tête-à-tête*, and she found him unusually agreeable. He expressed his pleasure at finding that she and his mother had, as he expressed it, "made it up," and hoped that he and his mother's guest would get on together, "in a brotherly and sisterly fashion, eh, Myra?" he added, in a rather mocking tone.

"Yes, Lionel! there is no reason why we should not," returned Myra good-humoredly. "I am sure you could be a very nice brother!"

“At any rate I’ll try,” said Lionel, “to be worthy of my sister.”

So Myra settled down as a member of the family, and the first strangeness soon wore off. She was quickly conscious that she was of real use to Mrs. Dallas, and was deeply gratified to find it so, while the conviction that her position grew more and more secure lulled the vague uneasiness which at first disturbed her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone. It had been a very dull season in Melford Road. Mrs. Dallas was much depressed, and went frequently to afternoon service, whither Myra always accompanied her. It was curious how Myra gradually found it impossible to do anything or go anywhere without her aunt, who seemed quite unable to do without her, unless indeed Lionel accompanied her anywhere. Then Mrs. Dallas was quite content to stay at home and alone. Lionel stayed at home much more himself than he did at first and appeared to take great pleasure in singing to Myra's accompaniment. He had a rich tenor voice, and she liked to hear him, while Mrs. Dallas declared that her dear children cheered and sustained her.

Toward the middle of January Lady Shirland and Miss Browne returned from some country visits and settled themselves in their comfortable, handsome house, where the former hoped her whimsical step-daughter would let her rest for a while. The weather was bright and frosty, and skaters began to hope that another twenty-four hours would make the ice on the Serpentine strong enough for their exhilarating exercise. Miss Browne had returned from a busy afternoon of shopping and visiting, and Lady Shirland, who had a slight cold, had prudently kept indoors, and was presiding over a tea-table daintily set forth with silver and china, scones, and thin bread-and-butter. She was a stately, portly woman of middle height, with white hair and a good complexion, keen gray eyes, and a wide smiling mouth that seemed as if it could appreciate good things. Miss Browne had just taken off her hat, showing a goodly supply of light yellow hair, very dry and dull; a coat trimmed with rich fur had been thrown off, over a chair near the window. She was very pale and rather above the average height, very thin and angular, but admirably

dressed, presenting indeed a perfect dressmaker's figure. The grate glowed with a splendid fire. The room was richly and luxuriously furnished and sweet with the perfume of hothouse flowers.

"The wind is decidedly northeast," said Miss Browne, in a slow, drawling, but carefully modulated voice, as she stirred her tea. "I was quite frightened as I came out from Howell & James's. The carriage was a little way off, and I felt it piercing my chest like a spear. I trust I may be spared bronchitis *this* year."

"Pray don't talk about it," cried Lady Shirland hastily. "It would never do. I fancy we are going to have a rather good season! There is a note from dear Lady Betty Lorimer. She is going to give a series of Cinderella dances in February, and quite counts on you. They are to be fancy dress affairs, and I believe they are to end in cotillions or some Russian dance!"

"Oh, indeed! Those early things are generally good before the season is too crowded. Have you had anyone to-day?"

"Only Mrs. Dacre and our vicar, who is in town for a few days. I asked him to dinner to-morrow."

"How tiresome! He is woefully stupid, and curiously obstinate!"

"I really don't find him stupid, Dorothea. He has plenty of plain common sense!"

"But it is *so* plain, mamma!" returned Miss Browne, who was just a little behind the age, and thought "mother" vulgar. Lady Shirland's reply was prevented by the announcement of "Mr. Leyton, my lady!"

Dorothea put down her cup and pressed her hand on the spot supposed to cover the human heart, as Leyton entered in very much the same kind of careless get-up he wore when he met Myra.

"My dear Jack!" exclaimed Lady Shirland, who was a genial, easy-going creature, and could never keep strictly between the lines of severely correct manner, as she rose and shook hands with him cordially, "I am delighted to see you! Where on earth have you been? It must be two years since you vanished."

"Just eighteen months, mamma dear," said Dorothea, smiling sweetly upon him, "since we met in Paris."

"Ah! Miss Browne! I trust you are all the better for your winter in the south! You look as if you had wrestled successfully with the fiend bronchitis."

"Thank you! I *am* better, and you know that a moment's respite is enough for my buoyant spirit to recover itself."

"Now sit down. Have a cup of tea, and tell me what you are doing."

"Not much," returned Leyton, drawing his chair near the table. "I am working here—I have a studio up in northwest district, and I am going to exhibit my Egyptian sketches as soon as the days lengthen a little."

"Oh! don't wait for that! they will look as well by gas-light, and in another month there will be such dozens of exhibitions! And do you mean to say you have been all this time in town and never called?"

"I scarcely liked to do so. I have lived so long out of the world, the polite world, that I scarcely dared to present myself;" and he laughed—a pleasant, sensible laugh.

"Oh, Mr. Leyton!" exclaimed Dorothea with a side-long glance.

"What nonsense," added her step-mother. "Then," she continued, "you have no news?"

"Nothing whatever. I came to you for that commodity. Tell me, have you seen anything of Wardlaw lately?"

"No!" replied Lady Shirland, "not since last season; but I fancy he must be in town now."

"I want a talk with him very much," said Leyton. "Was he not a friend of Colonel Dallas, and of his brother, the artist, who drifted out of society?"

"Very likely. Mr. Wardlaw knows everyone. We know the widow of Colonel Dallas—one of the most charming women possible—so soft, so refined. Isn't she, Dorothea?"

"Oh, yes! with great, dark Oriental eyes that make you think of Lalla Rookh."

"You know it was so unlucky, poor Colonel Dallas died just a week after that rich old George Dallas. Now, if he had outlived him a week, though there would have been no time to make a will, and the fortune would have gone to Cecil Forrester probably all the same, the widow would have had her third, and a very handsome income it would have given her. Now she is comparatively poor."

"What sort of a fellow is Cecil Forrester?" asked Leyton.

"An ordinary, well-bred young man. I hardly know him. Have you never met him?"

"No!" said Leyton. "Why I ask about him is this: I knew Frideric Dallas well, and studied with him long ago at Munich; at least, I shared his studio. He was as good a fellow as ever lived—simple as a child. His daughter is utterly unprovided for. I wonder if things were properly represented to Forrester he would settle some fraction of his wealth upon her? You know if——"

"Yes—yes," exclaimed Lady Shirland, hastily glancing at Dorothea, who was looking down in a maidenly manner, and feeling a beautiful Persian cat with a silver bell round its neck. "We need not discuss that now! I don't suppose Captain Forrester would do anything of the kind; no man ever likes to part with his money! besides, this girl does not want it. Mrs. Dallas has most kindly, though perhaps not too wisely, adopted her."

"Will that be permanent? Mrs. Dallas is, you say, not very well off herself. The whole maintenance of Miss Dallas ought not to be thrown on her?"

"Do they call her Miss Dallas?" asked Lady Shirland. "I am sure, Jack, I should not meddle if I were you."

"I should like the matter brought to Forrester's notice, however," persisted Leyton. "Isn't Wardlaw a great chum of his?"

"He was his guardian, I think," said Dorothea. "You might ask him. It would be very unkind of Captain Forrester not to give her an allowance or annuity or something. It must be such a pleasure to help anyone," she continued, with girlish good-nature. "I was always sorry 'or that poor little thing, for I am quite sure she used not to get on with Mrs. Dallas."

"Well, you know Mrs. Dallas, in one of her letters to me, said there had been some misunderstanding, and that she feared she had not been quite kind to her niece," remarked Lady Shirland.

"Very sweet of her to confess it," added Dorothea.

"I am sure," began Leyton, with some hesitation, "you will excuse me if I venture to recommend my old friend's daughter to you both. The notice of a young lady like

Miss Browne would be of immense advantage to her, for after all Mrs. Dallas must be rather too much her senior to be a thoroughly sympathetic companion. She was such an idol with her father, such a bright, gentle child when I remember her, that I am awfully sorry to think of her helpless condition."

"Poor child!" cried Dorothea with enthusiasm. "I shall certainly do all I can for her;" and she clasped her somewhat large bony hands together and looked up into Leyton's eyes in a thrilling manner.

"I felt sure of *your* kindness," said Leyton, returning the glance with interest.

"Of course," resumed Lady Shirland, "we should be most happy to be of use to any friend of yours, Jack, but now that Mrs. Dallas has adopted your young *protégé*, I don't think she is much to be pitied. I should like you to meet Mrs. Dallas. Come and dine with us next week. I will persuade her to fix a day, and——"

"My dear Lady Shirland, I have not dined out for years, and almost forget how to behave myself. I am quite useless for social purposes. It is an act of infinite grace that you permit me the *entrée* of your drawing room. I am hardly fit to appear before Miss Browne, with whom, alas! I cannot claim the privileges of an old friend."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Leyton, I am very pleased to see you! I am so struck by your kindness to Miss Dallas. You really must come, if it were only to induce her to accept me for a friend!" cried Dorothea bashfully.

"None could be so persuasive as yourself," began Leyton, when he was interrupted by the opening of the door and the solemn announcement, "Mrs. Dallas!"

The entry of that lady in her best and most dignified style, and her deep mourning, was most effective. Lady Shirland held out both hands, and Dorothea quite ran to meet and embrace her.

"Now this is really nice and good of you," said the former. "I had despaired of ever seeing you within our walls again."

"Dear Mrs. Dallas, I am so glad you have summoned strength to look on the world once more!" whispered Dorothea audibly, as she kissed her.

"Do sit down near the fire. Dorothea, get a screen and

a footstool. How did you come? Walked? Oh! you must be very tired."

"No, indeed, dear Lady Shirland. Since I have had my niece with me I have walked more than I ever did in my life before;" and she turned her great lustrous eyes on Leyton.

"Mr. Leyton, a relative of mine," said Lady Shirland, with a wave of her hand. "Mrs. Dallas, Mr. Leyton."

Mrs. Dallas bowed gracefully, and took a cup of tea presented by Dorothea, while Leyton handed her the scones.

"This is my first visit," resumed Mrs. Dallas, in sugary tones. "I was so vexed to be out when you called that I determined to conquer my own morbid aversion to movement, and indulge myself by a visit to you!"

"The first of many, I hope," cried Dorothea, dropping carefully on a footstool at her feet, from whence she could look up with equal effect into Leyton's eyes, or those of Mrs. Dallas.

"Do you know we were just talking of you and your niece!" resumed the countess. "Mr. Leyton knew her as a child in Munich, and is deeply interested in her."

"Ah, yes! I have heard Myra speak of you, Mr. Leyton," said Mrs. Dallas, with a slow smile. "She is very grateful for your kind notice. She will be sorry not to have been at home when you called just now. She has gone with my son to see if there is any skating on the Serpentine; her life with me is rather dull, and the young need the young for cheering companionship."

"She is a fortunate girl to have such a friend in you!" exclaimed Lady Shirland. "Do you know, Jack, I should like you to tell Mrs. Dallas your idea about Captain Forrester. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Of course not!" said Leyton. "What the devil made her suggest it?" he thought, and proceeded with a polite apology for interfering in what did not concern him, to explain his views respecting an application to the heir of George Dallas's wealth.

"How very good of you," said the handsome widow, with a melting glance. "To think of undertaking so disagreeable a task is indeed a proof of friendship! But, my dear Mr. Leyton, I will not impose it upon you. I cannot

agree to any application being made to Captain Forrester. He has never made the smallest advance to me—never acknowledged me in any way. And though he *must* know what a loss to me *his* gain must be, it has never occurred to him to make it up. I am thankful to think I can do without his aid, and I will never stoop to ask it for my dear husband's niece."

"Well, Mrs. Dallas, that may be very high-minded," said Jack, "but I doubt if it is wise. You do not know how matters may turn out, and Myra may be a drag on you one of these days. However, you know your affairs best! Now, Lady Shirland, I must say good-by. I've been paying you a visitation."

"By no means, Jack. Before you go I want dear Mrs. Dallas to fix a day to dine here and bring her son (she has a charming son) and her newly-adopted daughter and yourself. Not another soul except Dorothea's guardian! Now do not refuse me, dear. It will do you good, and six months' complete seclusion is enough, I am sure, to prove your respect even for so excellent a man as the poor colonel."

A good deal of pleading followed. But Mrs. Dallas was gently firm. She would not and could not dine out even with her beloved Lady Shirland and Dorothea yet awhile!

So Jack Leyton took leave of the ladies, and the project fell through.

"If you will not dine with us," said Miss Browne coquettishly, as she bade him good-by, "we will go and have tea with you. I do want to see your studio; I love pictures."

"You are very good!" said Leyton. "I shall be delighted and honored; but mine is a bare barrack of a place, and horribly out of the way; but I'll write and ask you to fix a day"—and with a parting bow he vanished. "What an interesting face!" murmured Mrs. Dallas, looking after him.

"Yes; hasn't he!" echoed Dorothea. "We used to see him often when I was a mere school girl, then he disappeared. I am afraid he has not been very steady."

"Ah, poor fellow!" ejaculated Mrs. Dallas in a reproachful tone.

"Why do you say so?" asked Dorothea.

"Because it is so easy to see what has disturbed his life! You ought not to be too hard on him, dear Dorothea!"

"Oh, Mrs. Dallas ! do not frighten me with such suggestions," exclaimed Dorothea, in the most approved shrinking tone. "I never dreamed of such a thing. I am sure you are quite mistaken!"

"Well, my love, I will not persist, but I am not often mistaken, and time will show. Pray forgive me, Lady Shirland, I hope I am not indiscreet."

"Oh! dear no! I have given up troubling about indiscretion," returned the countess impatiently. "Jack Leyton used to be a very good fellow, and is still, I believe. Something went wrong with him and I lost sight of him for some years. We were all awfully vexed when he left the army. His people were distant relations of mine, and friends into the bargain. We must try and get him to come back into society."

"No one could do more for him than yourself, dear Lady Shirland!" said Mrs. Dallas in her most caressing manner. "I am sorry I did not ask him to call on *me*, though an obscure widow like myself can be of little or no use socially."

"A woman with the power to charm is always of use," returned Lady Shirland. "Shall I tell him you would be happy to see him?"

"Pray do! I should be very pleased."

"And, dear Mrs. Dallas, do let your niece come and see me. I have never met her, and I should like to be of use to her if I could!" cried Dorothea. "Young people can get on together so easily."

"How sweet of you to think of her! I fear she might bore you; she is a shy, unformed creature, well disposed, but not very bright."

"How has she grown up as to looks? I saw her once, about two years ago, when I thought her rather plain," said Lady Shirland.

"She has improved, but one could not call her pretty."

"Poor little thing! I quite long to know her," said Dorothea ardently. "I shall call to-morrow—no not to-morrow, the day after, before luncheon, if I may, Mrs. Dallas?"

"If you may? If you will be so good, dear! Now I must leave you. It is late, and those children will be looking for me."

"Let me send Thomas with you; it is so unpleasant to walk in the dusk,"

"You forget, Lady Shirland, that I am—I must be—accustomed to take care of myself. I will not trouble Thomas."

"I will come down with you," said Dorothea.

"Pray do not trouble——" Mrs. Dallas was beginning, when she caught a glance from the young lady which cut short her remonstrance.

"Good-by, dear Lady Shirland. I am so glad I forced myself to come here to-day. You have quite cheered me!"

"Then pray come soon again, and you *must* make up your mind to dine with us. It is high time you came out of your shell. Good-by!"

"I am delighted to have a chance of speaking to you once more!" said Miss Browne in a half whisper, as they descended the stairs. "I have a hundred and one things to tell you; you can advise me, for you are almost the only creature who understand me and my peculiar position."

Mrs. Dallas pressed her hand. "You are so observant! *You* noticed something peculiar in Mr. Leyton's manner?"

"I should be blind if I had not," returned Mrs. Dallas, smiling sweetly and significantly.

"Ah-h-h!" a long drawn ah. "It is an old, old story! But I will come and have a nice long talk with you!"

"Do, my love!" They shook hands and parted. The handsome widow went away toward home with her swift-gliding step, murmuring some sacrilegious syllables which sounded like "tiresome idiot!"

When Mrs. Dallas reached home she found the lamp in her pretty drawing room alight and the fire burning brightly.

Lionel was walking to and fro with a look of annoyance on his dark face, and Myra still in her outdoor attire, holding Leyton's card—a small bit of pasteboard on which he had written his name—and gazing at it with suspiciously moist eyes.

"I did not expect you would be back so soon," said Mrs. Dallas, taking off her warm cloak and looking from one to the other.

"Oh, Mrs. Dallas!" cried Myra, who could not all at once get back into her old habit of calling her aunt. "Mr. Leyton has been here, I *am* so sorry to have missed him!"

"I believe you are half crying about it!" said Lionel, with indignant pique. "Who on earth is this Leyton?"

"I have just told you!" returned Myra impatiently. "The only old friend I have in the world, and had you been snatched away from everyone and everything you loved, as I was, you would be as glad to see a friend you new in the happy days as I am."

"No doubt," interposed Mrs. Dallas, with smiling eyes, "as you will be glad to see Lionel in some future time. However, you have not lost your old friend, Myra. I met him just now at Lady Shirland's, and have asked him to call again. He seems an interesting man."

"Oh, thank you, Aunt Dallas! He is very nice and good, and such a clever artist. You would like to see his studio!"

"No doubt, my dear. Now go and take off your things; your inner will soon be ready."

Myra smiled and disappeared.

"What do you mean by encouraging her whim for this eggarly artist," said Lionel to his mother with savage impatience.

"Would you be so dense as to fan the incipient flame by opposition? I am ashamed that a son of mine should be so dull. Pray observe my play and follow suit. I am quite aware this Leyton is a man to be avoided, but dexterously, not with brutal, frank avoidance; whatever the barrier we rise between them, *he* must seem to be the builder. I thought I had made you understand the importance of patience in this case."

"Yes, yes, I know! you are clever and cool and tenacious, but you haven't to fight with the fever I have to master. Ever since I first met Myra I have wanted her. First, I liked to tease and anger her; then when she refused to kiss and be friends, and grew indifferent to my teasing and displeasing, I came partly to dislike, and partly to love her. A kind word or two sets me wild with delight. Now, since you have consented to overlook everything for the sake of my happiness, I begrudge the time that is lost in these slow approaches. She does not know I want her for my wife; she probably thinks I am amusing myself. When she finds I wish to marry her, to give her the permanent protection of my name, she will learn to love me."

She must, she shall, and I will have no man come between us."

"Do you think I will not guard her for you?" said Mrs. Dallas, with a quick flash of resolution in her eyes. "You little know me. But your precipitancy will only delay your happiness; be guided by me."

"I will be guided by you if you tell me your motives. You have been a generous mother to me, but I don't think you are disposed to general benevolence."

He paused. Mother and son stood looking into each other's eyes for a second.

"Yes, Lionel. I will tell you everything, but not now; this evening, later, when we are alone. Meantime be as brotherly as you can. I do not quite understand Myra, but I feel that her nature is cold compared to ours, and the fire you would kindle in her must be most carefully, most judiciously nursed before it will catch alight. There, go! Dinner will be ready directly."

That meal passed pleasantly. At first Lionel was somewhat silent. Mrs. Dallas talked easily, and he gradually chimed in. His mother gave him an imaginary message from Miss Browne, about going to see some new play, and then added:

"You might take Myra to see the pantomime. I don't suppose she was ever at one. There is no reason why you should not go."

"I shall be very happy," returned Lionel. "But I fancy Myra would enjoy an opera more."

"I shall enjoy anything in a theater!" exclaimed Myra.

"I have some engagements next week," proceeded Lionel, "but I will see about places, as Myra would like to go."

"Thank you!" said Myra; and the conversation turned to another channel.

"I don't feel up to anything to-night," said Lionel, throwing himself into a chair when he joined his mother and Myra after dinner. "I have a curious sense of exhaustion, as if I had been engaged in some struggle and had had the worst of it. Will you soothe my weary spirit by the concord of sweet sounds, Myra? Sing the 'Schlummerlied' I like so much."

"Oh, yes," cried Myra readily; and for some time she

played or sung what Lionel asked, while Mrs. Dallas sat in profound silence working an interminable piece of crochet.

"If you do not want me to-morrow," said Myra, stopping rather abruptly and turning round on the piano-stool, addressing Mrs. Dallas, "I think I shall go and see Mrs. Keene. I have only been able to call there once since I came here, when she was out."

"It happens I do want you, Myra! I had planned to do some shopping in Regent Street, and ever since my sad loss I am subject to attacks of dizziness, so I do not like being quite alone."

"Very well," returned Myra, "of course I shall go with you."

There was a moment's pause, then Myra resumed, "I will write a letter to Mrs. Keene, and say I will come next week, but I stupidly forgot to get any stamps to-day."

"Do not mind that," said Lionel. "I shall be going out directly to smoke a cheeroot, and I'll post it for you."

"Thank you very much. I will write at once."

She left the room for that purpose, and silence reigned till her return, when Lionel took the note, and looking to the supply of his cigar-case sallied forth.

Soon after Mrs. Dallas said in her kindest tones:

"You are very pale, Myra. You had better go to bed early, my love."

Myra was nothing loth. Mrs. Dallas did not amuse or interest her, so asking leave to take a book, and receiving a smiling injunction not to set the house on fire, she said good-night.

Mrs. Dallas continued to weave the meshes of her crochet, thinking deeply the while, an expression of satisfaction dwelling on her handsome face. Presently she rose to add a log of wood to the already excellent fire. As she resumed her seat her son re-entered.

"Gone?" he asked, looking round.

"Yes; I sent her to bed."

She is really not difficult to manage. "Not so far! It is a fine clear night, but very cold. I hate winter."

Lionel took his stand on the hearthrug as he spoke, and drawing Myra's note from his pocket handed it to his mother,

She very calmly opened and read it.

"A very harmless production," she said, "and highly complimentary to the dear aunt. Nevertheless, these communications must be cut off;" and throwing the note on the fire she held it down with the poker till it was completely consumed.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE TOILS.

DOROTHEA BROWNE lost no time in fulfilling her promise to Leyton. The day but one after his visit she drove up in a hansom before luncheon to Mrs. Dallas's door, and asked if that lady and Miss Dallas were at home.

The visit was so unexpected at this hour that no instructions had been given, and Mrs. Dallas, lounging over the morning paper in a decidedly grubby, gray dressing-gown, her abundant but straight black hair screwed up with cunningly-devised pins, to produce the "natural" wave which so greatly enhanced its beauty, beat a rapid retreat, when the front door visitor's bell announced an invader.

Myra was, therefore, left alone to receive the effusive spinster, and for a moment felt rather awed, as Lady Shirland and her step-daughter had always been represented to her as persons of the highest distinction and most refined taste; but the first few words put her at ease, while she gazed with some surprise at the towy hair, marked eyebrows, and ultra-fashionable mourning "get-up" of her visitor.

"I presume you are Miss Dallas," began Dorotha, with a fascinating smile, her head a little on one side, and holding out a carefully gloved hand. "My visit is really more to you than to dear Mrs. Dallas. I am *so* pleased to make your acquaintance. We have heard so much about you!"

"There cannot be much to hear about me! You are very good," said Myra, as Miss Browne sank on the sofa.

"Don't be too sure! You are *l'enfant gâtée* of this house."

Miss Browne largely interlarded her conversation with French phrases, which shall be translated. "Then an old friend of yours and of mine, Mr. Leyton, was talking of you the last day he called. I believe you knew him abroad?"

"Oh, yes, he was a great friend of my father's and was so good to me always!" cried Myra, coloring vividly, she knew not why. "It was very kind of him to mention me." Dorothea looked at her for an instant with half-closed eyes.

"He asked my mother and myself to visit his studio. I dare say you would like to come, too?"

"Yes, very much; but I have seen it. He has some delightful pictures; there is an autumn landscape, and a group of Orientals in Cairo reading the newspaper, that are quite charming!"

"Oh, indeed! I suppose you are half artist yourself?"

Myra shook her head. "Barely a quarter," she said smiling.

"You really ought to study," continued Miss Browne. "There are admirable schools in London. There's the Slade—really wonderful—and so cheap!"

"Yes!" returned Myra somewhat hopelessly.

"Now, my dear Miss Dallas," continued Dorothea, "you must help me persuade your aunt to come to us; just a quiet dinner and music—you play? I so want a friend who will play and sing with me! for I am rather lonely, though my mother is a charming person; but youth needs youth, doesn't it, dear? By the way, you must find young Mr. Ashby a nice companion."

"Oh, yes, very nice," said Myra vaguely.

"Yes, I should think so. Oh! dear Mrs. Dallas," as that lady, renovated and decorated, entered the room, "we are just talking of your son! Miss Dallas has been telling me what a delightful companion he is."

At this startling statement Myra, remembering certain snubbings in former days, looked rather uneasily at her aunt. A bland smile, however, overspread her face.

"Oh! Lionel and Myra are very good friends," she said, "they are like brother and sister."

"Brother and sister! like Paul *et* Virginie, I imagine," cried Dorothea with a significant nod and smile.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Dallas, and added with a sigh, "they are both very dear to me!"

"You have such a warm, generous heart!" exclaimed Miss Browne effusively; "*that* is why I have so much comfort in confiding my little troubles to you."

"I feel always flattered by your trust! Myra, my dear,

[I left a paper on the dining room table which I want copied—will you kindly do it for me?"]

"Oh, yes, of course," and Myra left the room, feeling she was dismissed.

"Poor little thing!" cried Dorothea, looking after her. "She is very sweet, but I really thought she was better looking! she is so colorless and unfashioned."

"Yes, a simple child of nature, but I trust she will improve."

"Pray, have you seen Mr. Leyton since?" asked Miss Browne.

"Oh, no! He only called here from a sense of duty to his old friend's daughter. I don't suppose he will come again for weeks."

"Perhaps not! but *do* you know, dear Mrs. Dallas, that she has been to his studio?"

"She? Who?"

"Why, your niece—Myra Dallas, of course. She is a simple child, but I thought I would tell you."

"Thank you, dear Dorothea. It was slightly imprudent, and I shall see that it does not occur again."

"It might be better not, and, sympathizing as I do with another young creature, I thought I would mention that when I first named him, she blushed celestial rosy red, love's proper hue!"

Mrs. Dallas darted one keen look at her interlocutor, then with a frank laugh exclaimed, "Poor child. I trust she does not waste sentiment in that direction. *We* know it would be wasted! Nevertheless, the vanity and impressibility of men is such that, the fewer opportunities Mr. Leyton has of seeing the effect his presence produces, the better for all concerned. But tell me, how is it that, with the evident attraction which exists between you, you and Mr. Leyton have drifted so far apart?"

"Ah! dearest Mrs. Dallas, it is a long and complicated story, and would try your patience!"

"By no means, Dorothea! Friendship must be cold indeed if it is not interested in a woman's most important story."

"You know," began Miss Browne, thus encouraged, "Jack Leyton's mother and mine—I mean Lady Shirland—were first cousins; and before he went to India he used

to come to our house. Dearest papa was alive then, and Jack used to play with me and tease me, and in short I did not understand him. Then some years after he returned from India, and all his people quarreled with him because he gave up the army and would be an artist. He used to be a good deal at our house, but Lady Shirland did not encourage him; she thought he was no match for me. I well remember his turning over my music often, and saying in a tone I never forgot, 'Pray sing, oh, let me hear that angel voice once more.' It was a simple ballad, full of feeling; of course he alluded to the singing lessons I had been taking when he was last in England. Another time, when young Lord de Crespigny was paying me marked attention, he sighed deeply, and observed, 'Lucky dog! I suppose *he* would not be sent boneless away!' alluding, of course, to the canine taste for bones. On one occasion he gave me a beautiful pin for my hat, and most unfortunately I lost it a few days after. I cannot—no, it is impossible to convey the despairing and reproachful expression in his eyes when I confessed the loss!"

"Ah! indeed, poor fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas in sympathetic tones.

"Now that we have met again," resumed Dorothea, "there is the same yearning tenderness in his eyes, the same thrilling pathos in his voice. I know it is the knowledge of my fatal fortune that holds him back, and my mother fears to encourage him; conventional scruples blind her to my happiness and so, dear Mrs. Dallas, I drift and drift. If any brave friend could hint to him the true state of affairs and give him back life and joy and——"

"Perhaps it might be managed," interrupted Mrs. Dallas.

"Another reason which prompts me to confide in you, dear," resumed Dorothea Browne, "is regard for your delightful son. He seemed a little, just a little, *épris*—a youthful fancy, merely," coquettishly, "and I am myself a little giddy and thoughtless, and amused with his artless admiration—but I would not wound him or you for worlds! You will warn him; I have no heart to give; and let me retain your regard, for indeed I feel that I am at a crisis of my life!"

"Courage, my dear girl!" cried Mrs. Dallas, swallowing a yawn, "and trust to me; do not waste a thought on poor

Lionel, he is too presumptuous; but take my advice: be prudent how you allow Myra and Mr. Leyton to meet. Doubtful, perhaps despairing about *you*, there is no knowing how his thirsty spirit might seek quench its longings."

"How wise you are!" cried Dorothea enthusiastically. "I shall be guided by you in all things, and perhaps your delicate tact will suggest some means of giving my naughty, difficult old playfellow a useful hint?"

"Trust me!" said Mrs. Dallas significantly.

"Now, suppose you let Miss Dallas return to luncheon with me. We can have a little music and a drive, and I shall bring her back to tea. My mother is gone to luncheon with the poor old Duchess of Kensington, who has been so ill, so we girls will have the house to ourselves!"

"Certainly, as you are so very kind! I will go and tell her to dress."

"Yes, if she likes to come."

"Of course she will like to come."

With a smile and a nod Mrs. Dallas left the room and sought her niece.

Myra was sitting by the half-expired fire, looking sad and bored.

"Oh, aunt!" she exclaimed, as that lady entered, "I could not find any paper to copy."

"No, of course not," replied Mrs. Dallas with a laugh. "I only sent you out of the way while Miss Browne told me her secrets."

"It thought so, and I stayed away!"

"Wise girl," said her aunt. "Now she wants you to go back to lunch with her. Go and put on your things. She will be a nice acquaintance."

"I am afraid my gloves are very shabby."

"Well, dear, buy another pair while you are out with Miss Browne; it will be something to do. Have you any money?"

"Oh, enough for that," and Myra went off to dress, glad of a little change. She had now been more than two months an inmate of her aunt's house, and she had begun to find that the want of work, or regular occupation, made life terribly dull.

The change to Miss Browne's company did not, however, prove so exhilarating as she expected.

That lady talked a good deal in a very lively manner; but her subject never varied: it was always Miss Browne.

According to her own account, she was a universal genius. She wrote short stories; composed lovely lyrics, which she set to music; spoke many tongues, and had a nice taste for art—only not quite so marked as her genius for music.

Myra found no room for more than monosyllabic notes of admiration, sincere enough at first; but, before the day was over, vague doubts began to form themselves as to the possibility of such gifts being enshrined in the fuzzy-headed, powdered, over-dressed, simpering, self-conscious, elderly young lady, who giggled and posed with affected grace before her. Among the many branches of her all-pervading subject—self—Miss Browne enlarged on the impression she had made on the too susceptible heart of that interesting young man, Mr. Ashby, whose superb eyes Dorothea thought worthy her notice. "He must have the blood of some Indian prince in his veins, Myra—you *will* let me call you Myra, will you not?"

"Yes, certainly, if you wish it, Miss Browne."

"Thank you, dear—but you agree with me there is something of the Oriental prince about Lionel Ashby?"

"I never saw an Oriental prince," returned Myra thoughtfully. "Lionel can be very nice, but I cannot see anything princely about him."

"Ah! that is because you have not much imagination, Myra. I have, alas! too much. That is partly the reason why I suffer so terribly from nerves and neuralgia," etc., etc., etc. A long list of maladies and their treatment followed. From these recitals it was a relief to examine the ornaments, pictures, china, and charming etceteras which embellished Lady Shirland's, or, to be more correct, Miss Browne's residence.

Myra had never seen anything finer than her aunt's drawing room, which, but for some really good Oriental hangings and embroideries, were, though effective, of the two-penny-half-penny order of decoration. She quite reveled in the beautiful things about her.

"You ought to buy Jack Leyton's Cairo picture; it would just fit in there," pointing to a space on the wall in a delightful room which Miss Browne termed her study.

"*Jack Leyton!*" repeated Dorothea uncertainly. "I suppose you were *very* intimate."

"I never heard him called anything but Jack," said Myra dejectedly. "If it is wrong I shall call him Mr. Leyton, but I always *think* of him as Jack."

"And do you often think of him, dear?" insinuatingly.

"Oh, yes, very often; whenever I think of my father, and my home!"

"Well, my dear Myra, I think you are very fortunate to have so happy a home as yours, with so kind and charming a woman as Mrs. Dallas."

"I am, indeed!" heartily.

"Now, I am going to give you a task," coquettishly. "Will you try to comfort poor young Ashby for my hard-heartedness; you might be a sweet little comforter if you liked."

"Very well!" returned Myra laughing; "but I think he comforts himself by going out a good deal. He is often away in the evening."

"Indeed!" returned Dorothea in a sharp tone. What she might have added remained unsaid; for the "young creatures" had sat long after their lunch, enjoying the feast of reason and the flow of soul; and Dorothea dearly loved a new listener, so she was greatly surprised by the entrance of her step-mother.

Lady Shirland greeted Myra with kindly courtesy, and then declared she was so exhausted by her efforts to make the dear duchess hear, that she must have a cup of tea at once. This altered the "young creatures'" plans; the carriage was countermanded for an hour; and Dorothea proposed to test Myra's skill in playing accompaniments, and her victim, though terribly nervous, felt obliged to comply. Then she found that the all-accomplished Dorothea sang woefully out of tune, and Dorothea said her delightful new friend was just a "leetle" deficient in time. "There is certainly something wrong somewhere," said Lady Shirland rather impatiently. "And, now, my dears, if you have no special plan to be frustrated, I want very much to pay a visit at the other side of Regent's Park; so perhaps the carriage can set Miss Dallas down at home, and return for you and me, Dorothea. You ought to come with me to see Lady Elizabeth."

"Very well," agreed Dorothea, who felt, half unconsciously, that Myra was somewhat less earnestly admiring than at the beginning of their interview. So Myra put on her hat, and took her leave, expressing her thanks with graceful shyness for a pleasant day.

"She is really a nice little thing, but quite plain, and rather dull! What do you think of her, mamma?"

"Plain? no! Not at all regularly pretty, but most interesting. And her eyes; did you notice her eyes? They would redeem any face."

"No, not particularly; they seem not exactly suited to her hair."

"Nonsense, Dorothea! She is a sort of girl an artist would go wild about!"

"Do you really think so? Well, unless Mrs. Dallas intends her son to marry her, she ought not to let them be so much together."

"Mrs. Dallas knows her own affairs thoroughly, I imagine."

Next morning was crisp and bright, and Myra looked rather wistfully out into the sunlit street.

"I know you do not care to go out before luncheon, aunt," she said, as Mrs. Dallas came into the dining room with a large workbasket in her hand. "But have you no errands I could do for you? I *should* enjoy a walk this morning."

"No, dear, I really have not. It may be an old-fashioned prejudice; but I do not like the idea of a young lady—especially a pretty, elegant-looking girl—wandering about alone. I was never permitted to do it myself, and I will try and take care of you, love."

"I am sure you are very kind; but as I shall probably have to go about by myself later, had I not better get accustomed to do so now?"

"I hope you shall not be obliged, my dear;" and Mrs. Dallas began to take numerous socks from her basket, also a skein of darning-cotton; then she looked at them and sighed.

"I will darn Lionel's socks for you, aunt," cried Myra. "You always look so dreadfully tired over them."

"Thank you, Myra, I know you are glad to help me;

really, we must be very careful! The way in which that tiresome Mrs. Dwyer robs and plunders in petty things is too disgraceful." The complainant was fresh from her daily struggle with the landlady regarding the minor supplies which passed through her hands. For Mrs. Dallas expected the largest amount of comfort for the smallest outlay of money; and had, moreover, a haughty and imperious manner of treating those whom she considered a step below her, which had converted her semi-Celtic landlady into a bitter enemy.

"It must be very annoying," said Myra—toward whom, by the way, Mrs. Dwyer was always particularly polite and obliging—and she proceeded to thread her needle and draw a sock on her left hand.

"They will be precious socks to Lionel, if he knows who mended them," resumed Mrs. Dallas.

"Not so precious as if Miss Browne had done them," returned Myra laughing.

"Ah! You are quite mistaken, Myra. Poor Lionel! Dorothea Browne's attentions turned my boy's head a little, but it is quite different now," and she watched her niece's speaking face, while she thought, "A healthy breeze of jealousy has set in." Myra darned on in silence.

"Did you buy your gloves yesterday, my love?" asked Mrs. Dallas, after a brief silence.

"No, aunt; I had no opportunity. Lady Shirland wanted the carriage."

"True! Well, if it keeps fine, you and I will do some shopping this afternoon. You shall buy your gloves, and I will get you a new hat and jacket, and one or two little things."

"You are too good and generous!" cried Myra, with moist eyes. "I can go on quite well till spring with what I have."

"No, my love. I wish to treat you like my daughter, and that you should look well. Of course, as I now consider myself your mother, I shall not think of making you that allowance. You must just come to me for everything."

"I ought to be most grateful to you—and I *am*," said Myra, feeling some self-reproach for the sort of regret with which she thought of being without a penny.

"Yes, I am sure of it, Myra." There was a pause,

during which Mrs. Dallas glanced at the "Births, Deaths, and Marriages," in the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Shall I tell you how you may help me infinitely, Myra?"

"Oh, yes! Pray do!"

"Try to keep Lionel at home of an evening. I am afraid he has fallen among a set of men who tempt him to play. He is really good and has never occasioned me any anxiety; but the best of men are weak. Ask him to stay at home to-night. Say we are dull without him."

"Yes, I will if you wish it," began Myra with evident reluctance.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas sadly, "would you hesitate?"

Myra felt herself a monster.

"Oh, no, indeed! aunt. Only you see—Lionel may think—that is—I would not mislead him for the world—I——"

"Do not misunderstand him or me. I shall take care, dear, that there shall be no foolish mistakes. Can you not trust me, Myra?"

"Of course I can."

"Then do not fail me, dear."

"No, I will not, aunt. And you—you will let Lionel know you asked me; for, you remember, he used to be a little silly; but now he has seen more, and knows nice, clever people like Miss Browne, of course, he will not think much of me," concluded Myra cheerfully.

Mrs. Dallas gazed at her a moment so searchingly that Myra felt as if her great black eyes could extract the inmost secrets of her soul.

"My son's fancy in that direction was of the most passing description, and though—like most young men—he is passionate and imprudent, he is not quite such a fool as to throw away his heart on a woman who is in love with, and, I have every reason to believe, engaged to another," continued Mrs. Dallas, a happy thought suggesting itself. "Mr. Leyton and Dorothea Browne have been long attached, but there were difficulties in the way. Now I fancy they are nearly, if not altogether, removed."

Myra was conscious of a sudden, unaccountable thrill of icy pain through her heart as Mrs. Dallas spoke. She could not understand herself. Why should she be vexed or dis-

tressed? Miss Browne was kind, and seemed to like her. If she married Jack Leyton, she (Myra) would have two friends instead of one. But how could such a funny, restless, unnatural kind of woman please Jack, who was so simple and unaffected, not to say abrupt, himself. It seemed in some inexplicable way positively tragical.

"Miss Browne has a great deal of money?" she asked, feeling it imperatively necessary to say something, because Mrs. Dallas was watching her covertly.

"Yes, a large fortune."

"That will be good for Jack. It is very trying to be poor, especially for a man. Then he will have a nice house, and buy lovely things?"

Somebody else seemed to be saying this while she herself, her real self, had flown away back to the dear old homely Munich study, and was busy sewing a button on Jack's glove while he stood beside her in all the glory of evening dress, like none other she had ever seen before or since; and yet, after all, only a tolerably good-looking man with an indescribable, distinguished, soldier-like air.

It was suddenly borne in upon her that Jack was terribly changed. He was no longer the sort of prince he once seemed; he had grown rugged and careless; only his quick, kind eyes, his fine carriage remained.

While these ideas—not distinct as here put down, but vaguely, painfully—swept through her mind, Mrs. Dallas was speaking:

"I am glad, Myra, you have such sensible convictions. Money is of the last importance. I am far from mercenary, but for those I love I dread poverty more than anything. That is why I am so anxious to make reparation to you for the injustice I have done to you. You suffered from poverty too long. Now one of my chief efforts will be to save for you and Lionel; *you* will not find yourself forgotten. Now I have some letters to write; put some coal on, dear, and if you *will* go on with your darning it will be a great relief. I am afraid I am a lazy creature."

"No, indeed, you are not; only you do not care for needlework."

A long silence ensued, during which Myra did not feel able to think clearly; an uncomfortable sense of being

watched, that her meditations might be divined, confused her mental operations.

After luncheon Mrs. Dallas sallied forth with Myra, and they spent a cheerful afternoon. Myra was most alarmed at the readiness with which her aunt spent what seemed to her large sums in replenishing her wardrobe. First, however, Mrs. Dallas let her choose and pay for a pair of gloves.

"What have you left?" she asked with a smile, as Myra put some change in her purse.

"Eighteen pence," replied Myra, laughing.

"What! your all? Well, you will not want much. When you do require a shilling or two come to me."

Lionel came in that day punctually at dinner time. As soon as that meal was over, he rose, looked at the clock, and drew out his cigarette-case. Myra remembered her promise.

"Don't go out, Lionel," she said, placing herself between him and the door. "Your mother and I are quite dull without you. Stay at home this evening. Let us have some music, and——"

"Do *you* wish me to stay?" interrupted Lionel, his eyes lighting up, his dark cheek reddening.

"Yes, of course I do; don't we, aunt?"

Mrs. Dallas did not speak.

"Ask me to stay for *your* sake, Myra," cried Lionel, drawing nearer and holding out his hand.

Myra sent an appealing glance to his mother, who, unseen by her son, clasped her hands in silent entreaty.

"Very well, Lionel," said Myra, with a good-humored laugh, but disregarding his outstretched hand. "Stay for my sake, and we shall have *such* a practice."

Lionel hesitated a moment, and then in a low voice murmured:

"I will go or stay, or do whatever you like."

"Thank you," returned Myra in the same light tone with which she had pressed him to stay, though her heart beat with undefined fear. "I should like you to sing 'Some Day'"—and she left the room, followed by Lionel and her aunt, who whispered a few earnest words to her son as they mounted the stairs side by side.

Lionel made no further display of feeling which could annoy Myra; and after many songs, and an attempt at a

duet, a game of dummy whist to amuse Mrs. Dallas—who loved cards—finished a quiet, sociable evening.

Though Myra made haste to bed, having a short bit of candle (Mrs. Dallas objected to gas in bedrooms, as being a temptation to sit up) she lay long awake, thinking—thinking; at last she made out why the idea of Jack Leyton's marriage with Miss Browne had sent her down into the depths. She felt that Miss Browne was a person whose presence acted on her spirit like the desiccating breeze from some desolate, arid region, where no raindrops ever slaked the dry and thirsty soil. It would be impossible to utter a syllable of her own sorrows, memories, or hopes to her; rather would Myra keep them from her knowledge, while the one joy of heart was to open it to her old friend Jack; to tell him every thought, to dwell with him on every sweet or sorrowful memory. If he married Miss Browne, of course, what was told to one would be known by the other; so Jack would be lost as a confidante. Oh, what a loss! That point settled, a more serious one presented itself. She was all but penniless, though she had found an unexpected two-pence-half-penny in her purse, which raised her capital to one-and-eight-pence half penny. That would not go far even in postage stamps and omnibuses; and she did want to go and see Mrs. Keene, who had never answered that last note of hers. When all was gone, could she ever force herself to ask her aunt for any more? No! she felt she could not. Was she going to be absolutely helpless? a kind of respectable captive. And Loinel's eyes! how they had terrified her that evening! Had she fallen into a trap? What a base, ungrateful idea; what a low-minded creature she was growing! Her aunt was so kind and generous. But, oh! for a little bit of independence! Reason as she would, an awful sense of being in the toils pressed upon her; her heart beat as if it would burst. Should she see Jack and ask his help? No! If he were the *fiancé* of Dorothea Browne everything would go to her, and through her to Mrs. Dallas. She was indeed without any help; and with bitter tears she prayed to God for courage and sense not to imagine horrors groundlessly, foolishly.

CHAPTER X.

GATHERING FEARS.

THANKS to bad weather, and his own masterly inaction, Leyton's "tea" in the studio was postponed till the last week in February.

It was a bright, clear day, and at the early hour of three, in order to secure light enough to see the pictures, Lady Shirland and Miss Browne drove away due north to reach the unfashionable quarter.

The studio was already occupied by two gentlemen guests, one of whom was a stranger to Dorothea. She was most carefully arrayed in dove-color and brown, with an elegant little brown and gold bonnet, and a very becoming veil, beaded with gold, drawn effectively over her "pencil" eyebrows, darkened underlids, and carefully powdered countenance.

"Very good of you, Lady Shirland, to come all this way for so little," said Leyton, meeting them at the door.

"Miss Browne, I shrink from the examination of your critical eyes. I know you are yourself an artist."

"Ah! Two of a trade never agree," said Lady Shirland, loosening her fur-lined cloak.

"That is a libel! You and I always agree, eh, Miss Browne?" returned Leyton with a smile.

"Oh, yes, certainly! Unless you assert very unorthodox opinions," returned Dorothea in a fluttered, "sweet seventeen" manner.

"Here is an old acquaintance of yours, Lady Shirland," resumed Leyton; "Mr. Wardlaw."

"Ah, yes! Delighted to see you, Mr. Wardlaw; have not seen you for ages! Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"Well, I have been to and fro between my friend Forrester's place and town. Now I am here for a couple of months, I shall have the pleasure of calling on you. Let

me introduce Captain Cecil Forrester. Lady Shirland, Miss Browne!"

"I think we have met before, Captain Forrester," said Lady Shirland. "We were staying together at Glen Houlahan Castle for the Northern Meeting some years ago."

"Yes, of course, I remember," returned Forrester with his usual cool, conventional politeness. "We had better have a look at the pictures while the light lasts; there are some nice bits here. I'm not much of a judge: I only know what I like. What do you think of this 'Autumn Morning'?"

"It is delightful!" said Lady Shirland, who had seen many galleries, and liked pictures. "The atmospheric effect is excellent, and those withered leaves lying on the water are so real, one is inclined to pick them up."

"It is right good," was Wardlaw's brief, hearty commendation.

"I am glad you think well of it, Lady Shirland," said Forrester, still looking critically at it, "for I am to be its proud possessor."

"I did not know you were such a genius, Mr. Leyton," murmured Dorothea, softly. "Why do you hide your heart, your aspirations, so persistently from your friends, who would gladly sympathize with you?"

"What, Miss Browne, do you want me to go about telling everyone what a deuced clever fellow I am?" asked Leyton, laughing.

"Ah, you are too contemptuous of your fellows—too hard. I am afraid of you," returned Dorothea, in the same low tone.

"Hard to *you*! Impossible! You might melt a pillar of stone," he returned gallantly.

Dorothea trembled.

"But you are going to send this to the Academy, Jack?" said Lady Shirland.

"Yes, with Captain Forrester's permission, I am going to try my luck."

"I was just suggesting to Mr. Leyton—rather audacious of an ignoramus like myself," said Forrester, "that he should paint, as a companion picture to this, 'A Spring Evening.' There's a nice bit of woodland near my old

house that would be the very scene for it. What do you say, Mr. Leyton?"

"It's a good idea. I'll come down to look at the place, and see what I could make of it."

Then the examination of Leyton's canvases went on: sunny bits from the banks of the Nile, where one felt the atmosphere palpitating with heat; shady English nooks; Highland streams brawling over rocks; Highlanders holding their hounds in leash; sheep with their attendant colliers; Egyptians of various classes; English troopers, Soudanese natives, etc., etc.; sketches of every description, but few finished pictures.

"You certainly have not been idle for the last couple of years," said Wardlaw to his host. "Now you must make yourself known; advertise, my dear fellow; advertising is the only means of success; modest merit starves in a garret; pushing self-assertion builds itself marble halls, and fares sumptuously every day. Organize an exhibition; feed the critics; give the fine ladies tea; invite the masters; butter up the big artists. There's a great deal to be done besides good work."

"Thanks for your words of wisdom," returned Leyton.

"Now, Lady Shirland, you must be exhausted. The light is changing; let us have tea," and he placed a couple of his best chairs by the table. "May I trouble you, Miss Browne, to preside? It is revolting to see tea poured out by a man."

"What a droll idea!" said Dorothea, taking the chair with a well-pleased smile. "Pray, who takes cream and sugar?"

Then the usual chatter flowed freely—art gossip, society, political, racing gossip, in none of which Leyton took much part, applying himself to pass round bread and butter and cakes, or handing a disgracefully black kettle which sang cheerfully on the hob of a not particularly well-kept grate.

Lady Shirland, hearing that Captain Forrester was looking for a house, entered into the question with great interest, and gave him much good counsel, strongly advising a flat as so much better suited to a bachelor.

"But I may not remain a bachelor," said Forrester, stirring his tea.

"Oh, I beg you a thousand pardons!" cried Lady Shirland. "I did not know you were going to be married."

"Nor am I, Lady Shirland. I only contemplate marriage in the abstract."

"Then avoid a house until you catch a wife. If you choose it without her, she will probably refuse to live in it."

"Why should she object, if it is a nice house?"

"If it be not nice to she, What will she care how nice it be?" parodied Wardlaw. "Don't fancy you will have it all your own way when you place 'Madame' at the head of your establishment."

"Among all the charming things you have shown us," said Dorothea, aside, to Jack Leyton, "I have not seen your group of Orientals reading the newspaper after one of the Egyptian battles."

"It is not here; I have sent it to a provincial exhibition."

"Is it sold?"

"No, not as yet, I believe."

"Ah, I should so much like to see it."

"How did you hear about it, Miss Browne? I don't think anyone has ever seen it except an artist or two—rough-and-ready fellows *you* could know nothing about."

"A little bird told me—a very sweet little bird, whose name is Myra."

"Myra Dallas!" repeated Leyton; looking roused and interested. "Then you have been kind enough to cultivate her. It is very good of you. I haven't seen her for an age."

"Well, Mr. Leyton, I have not seen as much as I should like of her. Mrs. Dallas always seems to want her to do this, that, or the other, and she had a bad cold lately. She was to have dined with us about ten days ago, but her aunt thought it was wiser for her to stay at home."

"I have called more than once," returned Leyton, reflectively, and pulling his mustache, "but aunt and niece were always out."

"Indeed! We thought Mrs. Dallas stayed too much indoors. Have you met young Mr. Ashby, Mrs. Dallas's son?"

"No; what is he like?" asked Leyton, with continued interest.

"Almost charming young man; graceful, accomplished, and so handsome—in a dark, Oriental style. He seems very nice to Miss Dallas; takes her out to concerts and to walk, quite in a brotherly way; and yet I should not think him the sort of man who would go in for Platonics."

"Platonics are all bosh!" said Jack abruptly. "So I suppose that on the whole Myra has a good time of it."

"Yes, very good, I should think. Mrs. Dallas is quite like a mother to her; can't bear her out of her sight, even to be with *me*. Is she not a charming, handsome creature?"

"She doesn't charm me. I should be afraid of the tiger's claws, which are, I suspect, sheathed in her velvet gloves. Besides, I can't bear dark women. My Venus must always be a blonde."

"Ah! my dear Mr. Leyton, you ought not to be prejudiced," cried Dorothea with a delighted laugh; "and I am sorry to hear you speak disrespectfully of Platonic attachments. I think that kind of pure and perfect sympathy must be so delightful, so elevating, so—so——" She stopped short for want of an epithet.

"I don't know anything about it," returned Leyton indifferently. "But I don't fancy it would elevate *me*. It might probably bore me. Then I am rather a low creature, and of the earth earthy."

"Perhaps you do not know yourself," said Dorothea stealing a melting glance at him.

"Very likely I do not," returned Jack indifferently. "Then you have not seen much of Myra?"

"Very little, indeed. She is such a shy, plain little thing, that I do not suppose society or parties would give her much pleasure."

"Plain! Do you mean plain in looks?" asked Leyton in a surprised tone.

"Yes, so colorless, you know, and so odd, that is so unconventional, isn't she, mamma?" to Lady Shirland, who had risen to take leave.

"Who, Miss Dallas? Oh, I rather admire her; only she is looking dreadfully ill. I called on Mrs. Dallas yesterday, and I was quite troubled about her. Do you know, I think it is rather imprudent taking her to live in the house with a fascinating young man. They will probably take a fancy to each other and, situated as she is, it is not

very likely that Mrs. Dallas would consent to such a marriage for her son."

Leyton looked very gravely at the speaker.

"I can't fancy Mrs. Dallas playing the part of a benevolent, self-sacrificing parent," he said.

"Ah! there you are wrong, Jack," cried Lady Shirland. "Mrs. Dallas is really a kind and tender-hearted woman; more so than I once believed her to be. She nursed poor Colonel Dallas most devotedly during his short, severe illness."

"Ah! You are speaking of Colonel Edward Dallas?" asked Forrester. "Well, I believe he *was* a very good fellow, and deserved well of fortune; but if he had not been carried off, why my position would have been very different—that is, for some years to come, for he had no children to transmit the property to."

"I don't fancy the widow would let it out of her clutches," said Wardlaw. "She had pretty well the whip-hand of Dallas, who was a capital fellow, but rather soft."

"Come, Dorothea, we have trespassed too long on our kind host. Be sure you come to see us soon, Jack. I am always at home on Sundays; don't forget, Mr. Wardlaw. Captain Forrester, if you will look in upon us, we shall be very glad to see you."

"Perhaps you will let *me* have that picture of which we spoke, if it is not already sold," whispered Dorothea.

"You must see it first, Miss Browne."

The three gentlemen escorted them to their carriage, returning for a few last words to the studio.

"Did you ever know anything of Fred Dallas, the Colonel's brother?" asked Leyton.

"Nothing. But I have heard he went to the dogs. We were both related in the same degree to old George Dallas. They on the father's, myself on the mother's side. I never saw anything of them. I did hear that Frederic Dallas formed some disreputable connection, and lived a queer life."

"I knew him well," interrupted Leyton; "a better man and a truer gentleman never lived. He has one child, a girl, totally unprovided for."

"Ha! indeed!" exclaimed Forrester, and fell into deep thought.

"I knew him, too, years ago," added Wardlaw. "He was an unlucky devil, but everyone liked him. Lady Shirland tells me the widow of Colonel Dallas has adopted his daughter. That looks well."

"It must be a serious addition to Mrs Dallas's expenditure," observed Forrester.

"Well, I suppose she has no daughter of her own, so this girl must be useful to her," said Leyton. "Why, you are not going yet?"

"I think we must. You'll dine with me next Wednesday."

"Thank you, I will. Not necessary to wear swords and ruffles, I suppose."

"No, by no means," returned Wardlaw smiling.

"Is it permitted to call on you in the morning?" asked Forrester. "I should like to have an opportunity of speaking to you on one or two points."

"I shall be very happy to see you any morning," replied Leyton. "I have no model at present, so a visitor is allowable."

After a few words of adieu, Wardlaw and his ex-ward departed, and Leyton was left alone in the fast-falling shadows of closing day.

The fire burned low as he paced the room slowly, thinking over the fragments of Myra's present history which had cropped up in the desultory talk of his visitors. He was puzzled by the profound uneasiness which had taken possession of him. Myra, who for a few short weeks had seemed almost his own property, had been swept away out of his sight; a great gulf, widening and widening every day, had opened between them.

Myra's deep blue eyes seemed to look into his out of the gathering darkness, and his heart thrilled with a nameless, probably a fanciful, sense of some vague difficulty and danger hanging over her.

But such fancies were weak and womanish. The present day, with its commonplace security, its general openness to the light of day, was not likely to be the scene of mysterious wrong done to an unoffending girl, who was further safe-guarded by her poverty and insignificance. Only, now as then, in the far away gloom of mediæval confusion, there is a terrible power which neither laws nor police can

check or regulate—the tyranny of mind over mind, from which none can deliver the victim.

Leyton had not been at all favorably impressed by Mrs. Dallas. He admired her greatly from an artist's point of view; he would have liked to paint a strong, deeply-colored Scriptural picture with her as a model for one of those grand, fierce Jewish women whose portraits stud the Old Testament at intervals like uncut jewels—Judith, or the wife of Jael, or Rebecca trying to cheat her own son. There was great power in her eyes; how could a slight, simple creature like Myra stand before her? Still, Myra had a sound Saxon backbone, and if she were in difficulty she must know that he, Jack Leyton, would help and befriend her.

“If I could do her any good, it would be worth having lived for through these weary, tasteless years,” was his conclusion as he threw himself into a chair and conjured up Myra's face and figure before his mind's eye. That turn of her head and throat, showing the sweet round of her cheek, and the delicate ear—how distinctly he saw it all! And then those blue eyes of hers that used to look so steadily, so kindly, so calmly into his; how unconscious of evil, and also of reality, they were!

“Is it possible,” mused Leyton, “that I could make a fool of myself a second time?—that I could put myself on the rack again? Not if I can help it; though, if I did her no harm, what matter? I wonder if that woman Keene knows anything of her? She was very kind, I believe, and Myra had great faith in her—but I am driveling. Why should I think evil of the Widow Dallas? What possible motive but charity or regard for her late husband could induce her to adopt a helpless young waif like my old playfellow? Still——” Leaving his meditations unfinished, Leyton rose, raked out the remains of the fire, put on an overcoat, and sallied forth, locking the door behind him.

At a steady pace, which got over the ground rapidly, without seeming hurried, he directed his steps southeast, across Regent's Park and past Portland Road Station till he reached Keene's Private Hotel. Mrs. Keene was out, but expected in immediately; so, after a moment's hesitation, Leyton asked leave to wait for her. This was immediately granted, and he was shown into her private room, where

a girl of seventeen or eighteen was writing at a small table in the window—a short, plump girl with a round, good-humored face, reddish hair, worn in a thick, curly crop, and gray-green, wondering eyes. She was well dressed—that is, she had on good clothes—a very bright-colored plaid frock, with a lace frill round her neck, fastened by a wide bow of decided blue; a fat, freckled hand held the pen, which she dropped in some confusion when Leyton was ushered in with a brief explanation, “A gentleman for your ma, miss.”

“Won’t you sit down, sir? Gran’ma will be in directly,” she said hesitatingly, as she began to put her writing things together.

“Pray do not let me disturb you,” returned Leyton, with a bow; “I fear I ought not to intrude, but I was anxious to see Mrs. Keene. I can return in half an hour.”

“Oh, no; *do* sit down. It has turned so cold, and gran’ma won’t be long,” returned the young lady, who was fast recovering her self-possession. “Maybe you are the gentleman about the second floor back?”—and she resumed her seat at the table, smiling amiably on her good-looking visitor.

“No, I am not. I called, hoping Mrs. Keene might be able to give me some information about a mutual friend.”

“I dare say she can. Gran’ma knows *such* heaps of people—naturally, you know, in her position. Gran’pa, too; he knows lots of quite swell people.”

“Very likely,” said Leyton.

“Gran’pa has been very bad for some time; he slipped coming on the pier from the steamboat at Dover, and twisted his ankle, so he was obliged to keep still. That gave him indigestion, and made him awfully cross! But lots of people came to inquire for him—countesses and baronets, and one duke.”

“Indeed!” said Leyton, properly astonished.

“Gran’pa is better now,” said the young lady, taking up her parable again. “He is able to travel; and he is going off next week with Lord and Lady Hargrave. They are an elderly couple, and waited quite a month for him rather than take anyone else.”

"Very gratifying," said Leyton, rising to examine a watercolored drawing over the chimney-piece.

He thought he recognized the subject, and he now saw it was the same sketch Myra had taken with him of a corner of Hampstead Heath, only this was colored—not badly done by any means.

"That's a pretty thing, aint it?" asked his interlocutor. "That was done by a particular friend of gran'ma's—*such* a sweet young lady. I love to see her come in. She is just like one of the young ladies in the *London Journal*—so elegant and gentle and distinguished looking. Oh, here is gran'ma!" interrupting herself as Mrs. Keene came in, looking the picture of solid respectability in handsome black silk and a velvet bonnet."

"Eh, Mr. Leyton!" she exclaimed. "I am very pleased to see you, sir. If you'll excuse me, I'll just put off my bonnet and be back in a minute. Wilhelmina, just you go up to No. 36. Miss Heartwell wants to speak to me. You'll do as well. And don't come back till I call you."

Mrs. Keene passed through the door which led to the private rooms of the family; and Wilhelmina, with a sweet smile, a nod, and a "Good afternoon, sir!" disappeared through the other.

Leyton continued to examine the picture. He could detect many faults; still, the coloring was wonderfully true, considering that memory must have supplied the tints.

"I wonder if she is strong enough to become an artist? In landscape, perhaps. It is not good for any human being to be utterly dependent on another; but it is deuced hard to get bread and butter enough with the brush, even for a man—as *I* know. Why, that young Forrester has given me the first good price I ever had in my life."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Mrs. Keene, re-entering. "I hope I haven't kept you too long. Please sit down. Now, it's curious. I have been wondering how I could get to speak with you for some time past. You see, I didn't know your address."

"I am glad I came, Mrs. Keene. It was rather a sudden thought. In short, I wanted to ask if you had seen Miss Dallas lately. Her father was a great friend of mine, and you see——"

He paused to choose the words in which he would explain the sort of responsibility he felt respecting Myra.

"Yes; I know, sir," she interrupted. "Miss Myra has spoken of you often."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"Not very lately, sir. She called about three—it might be four—weeks ago, and her aunt, Mrs. Dallas, came with her."

"I am glad to hear that," cried Leyton hastily.

"Well, I don't know," continued Mrs. Keene cautiously. "Maybe you are a friend of the aunt's, sir?"

"No. I don't know her beyond having been once introduced to her."

"You see, it was no use her coming here with Mrs. Dallas. We couldn't speak a comfortable word. Indeed, Miss Myra hardly spoke at all. Mrs. Dallas was sweet as sweet, and made me an elegant bit of a speech about my goodness to her dear niece, for which she would ever feel grateful. Then she said as how missee would never want nothing from anyone again, as she (Mrs. Dallas) had adopted her, and they were going to live happy ever after. 'Unless, indeed,' ses she, 'Miss Myra deserted her aunt for a home of her own.' And with that she smirked as if she knew a thing or two. But my dear young lady, she just looked white and dazed and sad, though she said she was quite well. Then she asked me why I had never answered her note; so I ses, 'I never had a note from you, and often wondered I hadn't.'

"But I *did* write to you,' ses she.

"There must have been some mistake in the post,' says Mrs. Dallas; 'for it was posted all right. My son took it to the post, and *he* would be sure to be careful of any commission from Miss Dallas,' says she.

"And altogether I felt as if she meant me to understand they were done with *me*. So *she* intended. Then they got up to go away, and missee says, in such a low, sad tone:

"'You'll take care of the picture for my sake, dear Mrs. Keene?'

"'That I will,' says I; 'but I hope you'll let me hear how you are going on now and again, for I love you dearly,' says I.

"With that she looked at me as if she wanted to tell me something, and her eyes filled with tears.

“‘Good-by, dear friend,’ says she, and put her arms round me and kissed me twice.

“‘When she did that I saw the aunt’s eyes glare at me, as if she’d tear out my heart and all it knew or suspected. It was just a moment’s glance—like a flash of lightning, showing all sorts of dangers—but it made me shake in my shoes. Then she says, sweeter than ever:

“‘Oh, yes; you shall hear of us. We are thinking of going abroad in the spring, and we may meet Mr. Keene in our travels.’

“‘With that she just nodded her head, as if to some low creature, and out she went. Miss Myra gave me another look out of her sad eyes, and I’ll never forget it. Then she went away, too; and it’s my belief I’ll never see her again.”

She stopped abruptly, as if she could not command her voice any longer.

Leyton listened intently without interrupting her by a word, feeling annoyed with himself for being so impressed by the good woman’s narrative.

“‘You have given me a very graphic picture of what took place,” he said. “Pray, was it in consequence of this visit that you wished to see me?”

“‘Well, partly, sir. You see I cannot help feeling that Miss Myra is kept at that place against her will.”

“‘I do not think there is anything to justify such a belief, Mrs. Keene. We must be reasonable. What possible motive could Mrs. Dallas have for detaining her niece against her will?”

“‘God knows, sir. But I felt it borne in upon me when I heard of that letter being posted by Mrs. Dallas’s son, that he had just put it behind the fire. I may be wrong, but that’s the thought that came to me. If it went wrong in the post why didn’t it come back from the Dead Letter Office?”

“‘Of course, a natural question; but even the Post Office is not infallible, Mrs. Keene, and as there can be no possible advantage to Mrs. Dallas in undertaking the protection and maintenance of her late husband’s niece, we have no right to suppose she is actuated by any motive save benevolence.”

“‘Yes, that sounds all right and reasonable enough,” re-

turned Mrs. Keene; "but the minute you stop speaking the same doubts and fears come back to me, and they won't go away."

"It must be better for Miss Dallas, happier and more comfortable, to reside with her aunt than to remain in that school?" said Leyton in an interrogative tone.

"It looks so, but—I know the dear young lady seemed pounds better and happier when she was at school, even in holiday time when she was all by herself."

Ah, that holiday time! How vividly it came back to Leyton.

"You knew Miss Dallas and her father in Munich, did you not?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, sir; and her dear mother, who saved my life, at the risk of her own, when Miss Myra was but a baby. I'll never forget the debt I owe her daughter for her sake. She was the sweetest lady I ever saw, but sad-looking and delicate; she died about a year and a half after I left Munich. I've been there more than once since; I married Mr. Keene there; and I always wrote to Mr. Dallas, and then to missee when she grew older. I was grieved to hear of Mr. Dallas's death. Keene had been abroad with Lady Shirland that year, and he told me about Colonel and Mrs. Dallas visiting her ladyship; that's the way I came to know where Miss Myra was."

"Yes, I understand," said Leyton absently. "Then Myra's mother—Mrs. Dallas," he resumed, hoping to draw forth some remark, "died while she was quite young?"

"Yes, sir, while she was a baby. Did you know any of her people? They might be friendly to her daughter, for they must be real gentry, to judge by her."

"I know nothing whatever about them, I am sorry to say. Now, Mrs. Keene, I will leave you my address; don't lose it," giving her his card. "If you want my help in any way respecting Miss Dallas, do not hesitate to send for me. But I think you—we disturb ourselves unnecessarily. No harm is likely to come to Myra. We live in the nineteenth century. I will call and see her. They have been out when I called before, so I must just try again."

"Yes, so you may, sir," gloomily.

"Come, come! don't be too suspicious," replied Leyton

laughing. His laugh sounded hollow to himself. "When I *do* see Miss Dallas I shall report to you. I am very glad she has so kind and true a friend in you."

He shook hands cordially with the good woman, and walked away westward from Keene's Hotel in deep thought. "I seem to have come back to life and vigor, though my reason is still in abeyance, or I should not be so irritated by that simple soul's 'raw-head and bloody bones anticipations,' " he mused. "They are absurd, of course. Yet I can't throw off the impression she has made. I *must* see Myra. I can be little or no use to her if I continue to lead the life of an ill-conditioned hermit. I'll go to Lady Shirland and her nymph-like step-daughter. I wonder what the half-caste's son is like; a subtile, insinuating, dark-eyed dog, I dare say. I don't fancy Myra plunged into such surroundings; still, the Dallas widow would nip any tenderness between the boy and girl in the bud. I must not hold back. I must come out of my shell! And, by Jove! I've been such a beggarly beggar for these years past—beggared in love and life and hope—that I must have a new dress suit! Did I ever think I should go in for such vanities again! Hi! hansom! To Hill Street."

CHAPTER XI.

LE MOT DE L'ENIGME.

It is to be doubted if any one of those high-minded persons who consider gold to be dross, and the coin of the realm filthy lucre, ever tried to go about without a penny in his pocket—literally without even a halfpenny to keep the devil from dancing in that *cul de sac*.

Granted that some princely millionaire given to experimental philosophy lodged, fed, and clothed him sumptuously every day, providing even a morning paper and a subscription at Mudie's to supply him with mental pabulum, would it not be humiliating to seek in vain within the coinless trouser or waistcoat pocket for the wherewithal to reward the industrious crossing-sweeper or a shilling to secure a lift in the ubiquitous hansom? Every heart would answer "Yes." To be moneyless is to be helpless, imprisoned, degraded, fettered, undone.

So felt Myra Dallas as she sat brooding over some needlework given her by her aunt, a couple of weeks after Leyton's visit to Mrs. Keene. She felt she had nothing to complain of; her aunt was kind if somewhat silent, and certainly not a very cheerful companion. She had good food, nice, well-made clothes, a comfortable house to live in, and—what to many people would be the crowning excellence of her lot—a good-looking young admirer ready to sigh at her feet on the smallest possible provocation; yet her absolute pennilessness spoiled everything. She scarcely liked to go outside the house when she had not a farthing wherewith to pay a cab fare, nor procure any of the trifles of which everyone has need, while to ask Mrs. Dallas for anything that cost money was utterly repulsive to her. What! Ask more when she was given so much? The sense of helplessness had been eating her heart for some time, but on this particular morning it had reached a despairing pitch, and for the first time Myra had confessed to herself that she

wished—oh, how ardently—that she had stayed with Mrs. Fairchild, no matter how dreary the place or how hard the work. What a fortune five pounds a quarter, with freedom, seemed to her now! Then there was her aunt's allowance; she would have given some of it probably had Myra elected to remain at Ruby Lodge. But the idea of refusing the proposition to become the adopted daughter of Mrs. Dallas had never crossed her mind; she could not have conceived that she would have been by degrees so "cribbed, cabined, and confined" as she was. The toils which entwined her were soft, as though the cords were enwrapped with cotton wool, and yet they held her fast.

Mrs. Dallas never said her nay, yet she gradually found that it was impossible for her to do anything she desired—at any rate, in the way she wished to do it. When she wished to see Mrs. Keene or Mrs. Fairchild, her aunt first postponed the visit as long as she could, and then accompanied her niece.

On rare occasions she was permitted to go out with Dorothea in the morning, or to spend an hour playing her accompaniments; otherwise she saw no one save Mrs. Dallas and her son. At first she rather enjoyed going to concerts and theaters with the latter, for which amusements Mrs. Dallas was always ready to grant permission. But Lionel was apt to grow too familiar during their return journeys, while her repulses generally angered him, and made things unpleasant on the following day.

Formerly Lionel's avowals of admiration only amused or nettled her. Now she felt fear and disgust, especially as she grew to notice that, instead of being displeased with her son for his attentions to Myra, Mrs. Dallas gave him every opportunity of being alone with her. A strange sense of insecurity grew upon her day by day. She reasoned against it and chased it away, only to return more strongly than before.

All this time she longed to see Leyton with an intensity that made her heart and head ache. Twice she observed his card when she came in from walking or driving with her aunt, and on exclaiming how unfortunate it was to be always out when he called, Mrs. Dallas said with a sneer that if he really wanted to find them home, he would not call at the time they were least likely to be in, adding, "But he

has kept his promise to the ear"—a remark which rankled long in her mind.

If she did not see Leyton, however, she heard a great deal of him from Dorothea, who had formed what she considered a romantic attachment to him, which she chose to believe was reciprocated. She quite bewildered poor Myra with her confidences, and convinced her that only his pride held Jack Leyton back from being her avowed suitor. That he should be attracted by such a perambulating puppet was an endless source of wonder to Myra, but what did she know about the world of men and women?

As Myra sat pondering these things sadly enough, while she stitched some delicate lawn cuffs for Mrs. Dallas, who for a wonder had gone out alone, the door opened to admit Mrs. Dwyer. The gaunt landlady had always shown an unusual degree of kindly attention to "the poor colonel's niece," as she termed Myra when she spoke of her. At present she carried a tray, on which stood a large cup of tea and a plate of thin bread and butter.

"I thought you would be glad of a cup of tea, miss," she said, placing the tray on a little table and carrying the whole thing over to Myra's side.

"I am, indeed! Thank you very much. You are always very good to me," returned Myra gently, with a grateful glance at the speaker.

"Is it to your liking?" pursued Mrs. Dwyer, lingering.

"Yes; very much. Won't you stay a little bit with me? I am all alone."

"So I see, miss," said Mrs. Dwyer, selecting the highest and hardest of the chairs. "Well, *sometimes* one's own company *is* best. Are you quite well, miss? You look pale and worried like."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dwyer, I am quite well; and I really have nothing to worry me."

"Well, that's a blessing, anyhow. I thought you was lying down with a headache, or I should have let the gentleman in."

"Gentleman! What gentleman?" cried Myra, a dreadful spasm of fear making her pulse surge for a moment.

"The gentleman who has called so often—as Mrs. Dallas has told me never to let in, especially if you was alone, for he is a bit queer."

"Why," cried Myra, clasping her hands, "you don't mean Mr. Leyton?"

"Yes; that's the name."

"Oh, why—why—why did you send him away?" cried Myra, starting up in despair. "How long ago? Could I catch him?"

"Stay, miss," as she ran to the door. "It's more than twenty minutes since I sent him away. Dear! dear! I *am* that sorry. I did not know that he was a friend of yours, miss, or he should have come in, I promise you. Don't you take on so."

For this last terrible blow was too much, and Myra, sitting down again, laid her head on the ~~table~~ and burst into bitter tears.

"He was my father's friend," she sobbed, "and the only old friend I have in all this wilderness of people."

"Well, never mind, miss. You tell him to call again; and I'll see there's a mistake made, so that he gets in."

"It is all no use," said Myra, suddenly growing calm with despair, and wiping her eyes. "We can never meet again. Everything is against me." Then, observing the keen curiosity with which Mrs. Dwyer was listening and looking, she thought it necessary to offer some explanation. "My aunt is very good to me, you know; but perhaps I miss my young companions at the school and—and—regular work, and I get low and fanciful. You—you'll not mention my foolish weakness, Mrs. Dwyer? I should be so much obliged to you if you will say nothing about it."

"No, miss. You needn't warn *me*. I would not say a word about it, not for a hundred pounds—that I wouldn't! And don't you either, miss. If you'll excuse the liberty, I would say, 'Keep friends with Mrs. Dallas—it won't do to offend *her*.' I know it may be venturesome of me to speak; but I have seen better days and no end of trouble, and I can see a good deal more than people think; and were I you, miss, I'd keep *very* pleasant with both Mrs. Dallas and Mr. Ashby."

Poor Myra felt distracted for a moment, between a dim sense that she ought not to be too confidential with her aunt's landlady and a burning desire to know what she was hinting at.

"What *do* you see, Mrs. Dwyer?" she asked, after looking

earnestly at her for an instant. "I feel rather miserable—I don't know why—and you almost frighten me."

"I'd be loth to do so, miss, though it might be kinder to say what I think. Only if *I* trust you, you mustn't let on to Mrs. Dallas. It would be bad for us *both* if you did."

"I—I would never say a word—you must feel that."

"Well, I do, miss; for you seem a real lady."

"Then what do you see?" repeated Myra, a little impatiently.

"That they never let no one next or nigh you but their own two selves."

"That is because my aunt is still too sad to see many people, and she is rather too careful about letting me out alone," returned Myra, determined to uphold Mrs. Dallas. It was a comfort, too, to resist her own vague dread.

"Ay, that she is, miss," emphatically; "but in the colonel's time she never minded how late it was when you tramped back to St. John's Wood. *She* didn't know her son stole out a while before to walk with you. She'd have made a nice row if she did. Why are you more precious *now* than you were?" this with an indescribably interrogative bend of the head to one side.

"You see, Mrs. Dwyer, my aunt had some reason to think I was an ill-natured mischief-maker at that time, so——"

"You? Is it you?" with a scornful, incredulous, upward toss of the chin. "If she believed *that*, she is not the woman *I* take her for. Well, why won't she let this gentleman—as looks *like* a gentleman—come in to see you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I dare say she thinks she has some good reason."

"Ah! Well, miss, if you have made up your mind to think her an angel, it's no use my speaking. Indeed, it ain't very wise of me to do so."

"Perhaps I ought not to listen, though you may be very sure I will never say a word about what you say. You ought to know, Mrs. Dwyer, that I am very, very poor. Indeed, I have no money at all; and though my aunt treats me like a daughter, I am dependent on her charity."

Mrs. Dwyer paused and slowly raised her eyes from the floor till they met Myra's with a warning look, and she said impressively in a low tone, "That's the queerest thing about it!"

"You are kind yourself, Mrs. Dwyer," said Myra gravely. "Why do you doubt the kindness of others?"

"Because I have lived longer than you have, miss. I'll say no more about Mrs. Dallas; but I *will* say—for it's my duty—that, though he can be nice and smooth and elegant, young Mr. Ashby aint nice really. He aint a gentleman. He's a regular limb! Why, there's my Sarah's brother; he's a waiter at the Melford Arms—it's the public house near the station—and my young gentleman is there often and often; and plays billiards and bets on the game; he loses heaps of mony, and wins a lot, too, sometimes. *He* aint nice by no manner of means! He *is* desperate fond of you, miss, but don't you have nothing to say to him! *that* I'll stick to."

"I am very, very sorry to hear you say so, Mrs. Dwyer. It is very bad for my poor aunt!"

"I don't think she knows nothing of it, though I believe she is real fond of him. More fool she! Now, Miss Dallas, you may think me a meddlesome fool, or not, as you like; there is one thing I *do* ask you to do, and beg you will be guided by me. I went into your room this morning to put a new cord to your blind, and I see that beautiful sapphire ring lying on your dressing-table."

"Yes! It was careless of me; but I was a little late, and forgot it."

"Well, miss, you take my advice: neither wear it nor leave it about, nor yet put it in your drawer. You take a bit of narrow ribbon and hang it round your neck, under your gown, and never let anyone know nothing about it. It's too much of a temptation for people, such things lying about"—this in a most significant tone.

"Yes, of course! But Sarah is so honest and respectable!"

"So she is, miss. But there are more people in the house besides Sarah! I have a charwoman twice a week; not that she would touch it, poor soul! but—" solemnly, "that ring is worth twenty pounds, at least, and—*nothing* is safe from the clutch of a gambler!"

Myra laughed. "Why, Mrs. Dwyer, do you think Mr. Ashby would steal?"

"God knows, miss!" then, with earnest entreaty, "*Will* you do as I ask you, miss? You'll be sorry if you do not!"

"I think you are a little fond of me, Mrs. Dwyer. I will do it to please you, only——" she paused and colored.

"I know, miss. You have no ribbon, nor a penny to buy it with. I'll bring you some narrow black silk braid; it will do as well." She hurried away, leaving Myra full of amazement, yet somewhat tranquilized.

To take one's dim terrors and hold them up to the daylight, does much to diminish them.

Mrs. Dwyer quickly returned. "There, miss, you put it in your pocket, and go put the ring round your neck, and never let no one cast an eye on it. If either of them asks for it, say you lost it. Hold on to it tight; it means twenty pounds, any way."

"I could not say that!" smiling. "But they will not think of it."

"Don't you be too sure! Hey, that's her ring; aint she in a hurry! The peg's in the latch. I hate people creeping in with a key. You must not see her now. Gather up your work, miss, and go to your room; it's warm here with the big fire. As soon as you're up I'll open the door. Tie on the ring *at once*, and be sewing hard by the time she gets up; don't be in a hurry." A second peal of the bell resounded before Mrs. Dwyer, with much deliberation and a stolid face, opened the door.

"Did you not know I took the key?" cried Mrs. Dallas impatiently, with an angry light in her eyes.

"Yes'm. That stupid Sarah has been cleaning here. She must have put in the peg, for fear the door might be opened on a sudden."

Mrs. Dallas looked keenly and suspiciously around.

"Anyone called?" she asked.

"Yes'm, that Mr. Leyton," handing her a card.

"Did he ask for Miss Dallas?"

"Yes'm."

"You didn't let him in?"

"Law, no, ma'am!"

"Nor mention him to her?"

"Certainly not, ma'am, on no account."

"Very right! He is not exactly a desirable acquaintance for my son." By this time she had opened the dining room door.

"Where is Miss Dallas?" imperiously.

"In her room 'm, I think. Leastways, I met her going upstairs half an hour ago; she said it was rather warm in the dining room."

Mrs. Dallas's face relaxed, and she turned into the room, while Mrs. Dwyer went on kitchenward. "Icy creatures need cold," she thought with a contemptuous curl of her lip. "This room is quite comfortable." A couple of notes lay on the chimney-piece. She opened one.

"Another invitation from Lady Shirland; she is most friendly. I wish I could go. It is just what I wanted, this admission into the inner circle of her acquaintance; but I must *not*. Not till this business is finished. If I do not go out, Myra *cannot* go without me! Heavens, how difficult it all is, and how swiftly time goes! I thought all would have been finished by this. From Lionel," looking at the second note, "what can *he* want!" She tore it open, and read:

MY DEAREST MOTHER:

I am going to annoy you. I write to avoid a scene. Can you, and will you advance me one hundred and fifty pounds, asking no questions, until we complete our grand *coup*? I am in sore need, and I know you have the money. Leave a line on my bedroom mantel-piece—to say "Yes." I shall not be in till late. We must hurry up.

Ever your attached son,

L. ASHBY.

Mrs. Dallas read this missive with pale cheeks and blazing eyes; then she read it again, and crushed it in her hands.

"A hundred and fifty pounds," she murmured. "What *can* he want with such a sum? It is not so long since I gave him a hundred. He does not seem to have any extravagant habits. His fancy for Myra keeps him straight in some directions. My God! does he gamble? It is in his blood. If he does, hope, ambition, everything, is over. A dose of chloroform would be the wisest ending. No, Lionel, you shall not rob me—you shall not have a hundred and fifty pounds unless I know why and wherefore."

She sat down to her writing-table, and traced a few lines, which she put into an envelope and addressed to her son. Then she rose, went to his bedroom, which was on the same floor, and placed it on his chimney-piece.

"I must see what Myra is about. That girl puzzles me," mused Mrs. Dallas, as she slowly mounted the stairs. "She

is gentle and accommodating, but there is something in her mind, or whatever we think with, that I cannot get at; and no one can completely influence another as long as a mental nook or corner is hidden. I feel that she does not trust me as she did, yet I am certain no one has a chance of counteracting my influence. No. Has she seen or done anything unknown to me? She is stupidly frank; it would be difficult for her to tell a lie—now, at least; once she began, a little practice would make it easy enough. And why is she not in love with Lionel? Women are ready enough to like him. She is just at the age, too, when a lover is almost a necessity. Lionel *must* be a charming lover. It would be better if he were a little more sentimental; these cold, fanciful Northern women don't know what they want. *He* must teach her. I hope she is not going to give me much trouble, or the sort of liking I had for her will turn to dislike, which will make the part I have acted much harder."

These reflections brought her to Myra's door, which stood half open.

Myra was sitting by the open window, the workbox and the strips of fine cambric she was stitching on a small table beside her. She was paler than she used to be, and to-day her lips looked white.

"My dear," said Mrs. Dallas kindly, "you ought not to sit in a draught."

"I do not feel it," returned Myra, meeting her eyes with a smile and also a slight increase of color.

"Nevertheless, it is not safe. I should catch my death of cold if I sat there ten minutes, but"—a sigh—"you are young, dear, with all the strength that youth and bright hopes can give, and I am beginning to feel the wear and tear of a rather disappointed life. Come down with me, Myra. I miss you when you are not by me."

"No one sees much sign of wear and tear about *you*, aunt," said Myra, looking at her with genuine admiration. "Many a young girl would be thankful to look as well as you do"—and she gathered up her work in preparation for her return to the dining room.

Nothing facilitated the task of doing the amiable which Mrs. Dallas, for some reason, had set herself, as Myra's appreciation of her good looks. Flattery was very sweet to

her semi-Oriental nature, and when Myra spoke thus she felt a passing feeling of benevolence toward her.

"Go on down, dear," she said. "I will leave my bonnet and cloak in my room."

When Mrs. Dallas joined Myra, she took up the newspaper, and after looking steadily and softly at her niece, observed:

"I am not at all satisfied with your looks, Myra; you have no color at all."

"I never had much, aunt."

"True; but you are pale with a difference, and your eyes are heavy, especially this morning. Nothing has occurred to disturb you? You have not seen anyone?"

"No, indeed, nothing; nor have I seen anyone"—but the memory of her conversation with Mrs. Dwyer sent the quick tell-tale blood into Myra's cheeks.

"You will be quite confidential with me, dear!" continued Mrs. Dallas. "I try to be as a mother to you, to atone for my past errors; all I ask in return is that you should be a confiding daughter."

"Oh, yes—certainly; whenever I have anything to confide," said Myra, laughing good-humoredly.

"She is hiding something," was Mrs. Dallas's mental comment.

When Leyton was sent away sorely disappointed from Melford Road, he turned his steps toward Caterham Gardens, and walked for a few minutes in a slow and undecided manner until his attention was caught by a face in a passing brougham.

"By all that's lucky!" he exclaimed, half aloud, "the angelic Dorothea. Driving away from home, too; means she is going out to luncheon somewhere. Shall I venture to call on Lady Shirland at this early hour? Yes, she is always uncommonly good to me, and, any way, I'll risk it."

Quickening his pace, he pressed on.

Lady Shirland was at home, sitting somewhat wearily in the pretty room generally used by her step-daughter and herself in the morning. She had let the *Times* drop from her hand, and sat drowsily thinking over the past and present. Life, on the whole, had been a weariness to her. She

had been always poor, though high-born, and her poverty had always been in her way. In her bright girlhood she had been more in love than she ever acknowledged, even to herself, with an equally well-born and penniless young Hussar.

They were not sentimentalists. They understood each other, and heartily regretted the impossibility of marriage in their circumstances. He went away somewhere, and straightway forgot his passing fancy, marrying a rich woman and thriving to his heart's content. Her memory lasted longer, and pervaded her being with a faint, sweet perfume of bygone delicious possibilities, like that of the dried rose leaves, and spice in pot-pourri.

Then, after a good many years, she went and did likewise, only her husband had more rank than wealth; and when, after some years of nursing and kindly care, he left her—no longer young, and by no means rich for her station—she accepted the plebeian Browne, who wished to give his adored daughter a titled chaperon.

Lady Shirland secured a settlement on the tacit understanding that she was to do her best to arrange a brilliant marriage for Dorothea.

At the end of that young lady's second season the paternal Brown took ill and died, and Lady Shirland found herself hampered with a daughter not exactly after her own heart. Years had tamed what social ambition she had once possessed; and although she paid her share of the house-keeping, residence with the wealthy Dorothea secured the free use of many luxuries and the power of saving a good slice of her income. There were times when Lady Shirland longed for peace—for a real home of her own and a more congenial companion than the accomplished Dorothea. "Mr. Leyton," said the footman. "Dear me!" cried Lady Shirland, rousing herself with a start. "I am very glad to see you. But has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing—unless I am wrong in presenting myself at this improper hour. It is so long since I saw you that, being in this neighborhood, though at an ungodly hour, I thought you might admit me."

"You are a good boy not to pass me by. I am all alone; and it is a godsend to have a pleasant companion," said Lady Shirland, ringing the bell, which was immediately

answered. "Thomas, Mr. Leyton will stay to lunch. You will, of course?"

"Well, yes; with great pleasure."

"Now, pray, tell me how comes it that you have not been near us for an age?"

"I have been a slave of the brush for some weeks. The light has been good, and——"

"You had better make up your mind to be a slave of the ring," interrupted Lady Shirland. "Do you know you are a young man I have no patience with?"

"I am very sorry to hear you say so. May I ask why?"

"I will tell you when——"

"Luncheon is ready, my lady," said the footman.

"When I have recruited exhausted nature," added Lady Shirland, rising and taking Leyton's arm.

The first fifteen minutes were very properly devoted to the duties of the table—duties never neglected by Lady Shirland, who loved dainty dishes. Nor was Jack Leyton an unappreciative guest.

"How is Miss Browne?" he asked, when the servants had withdrawn.

"Very ill," returned the dowager, "and much occupied. She has found a new disorder and a new doctor."

"Perhaps one brought on the other," suggested Leyton.

"I will not commit myself. Really Dorothea is a dear, affectionate girl, and has a crowd of good qualities. Her only little follies are about her health and taste for quacks. She has a feminine longing to put faith in some man. If she had a sensible husband we should hear no more of these fads. She would be a devoted wife."

"No doubt," said Leyton, with an indescribable glance at his hostess.

"You would like a cigarette. Pray, don't mind me."

"Couldn't think of it, Lady Shirland,"

"Nonsense! Men always smoke when they come here. We should have been woefully shocked at such a thing when I was young; but, dear me! the shocks of yesterday are the soothing of to-day. Tell me what brought you to the neighborhood so early."

"A very fruitless errand—an attempt to find Mrs. and Miss Dallas at home."

"Well, you succeeded *this* time?"

Leyton shook his head.

"Mrs. Dallas was here this morning for a moment *en passant*. She left some Indian embroidery for Dorothea to copy, or some such nonsensical time-wasting device; and she was *alone*. Depend upon it Miss Dallas *was* at home."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Leyton, with such a look of annoyance that Lady Shirland's attention was roused.

"Why do you hunt after those people so persistently, Jack?"

"I don't hunt them; but I want to see my old friend's daughter."

"You have been unlucky, I grant, but there's something more. Speak out, my dear Jack."

"Your cruel words just now have frozen up the fount of confidence," he returned, laughing. "Why have you no patience with me, Lady Shirland?"

"It is a long story. I'll answer it with another 'why.' Why did you destroy your prospects by throwing up a good profession and wasting a good start?"

"You mean the army? Because, if I had not taken the initiative, it would have rejected me. I am innately lawless. I might lead, if I had a chance; I cannot follow."

"A confession of weakness, my dear young friend."

"Yes, I think it is, Lady Shirland; still, 'It is my nature, too.' I was conceived in some Bohemia of the soul, and I can only 'light on my own box.'"

"Nonsense!" cried Lady Shirland. "We are all born under social laws which, on the whole, are the outcome of human necessities, therefore, they are the best we can get. Do you think you have done yourself any good by thus kicking against the unavoidable pricks?"

"Well, I have done myself no harm. In short, though probably I shall never do much, in painting or daubing I have found my natural niche; and, Lady Shirland, marvelous to relate, I begin to make money—at least, what I consider money; you would consider it a crossing-sweeper's copper. I got so low, before I went to Egypt, that decent pay seems a fortune to me."

"I cannot understand you, Jack. I suppose you have a history that would account for your disappearance, and much besides."

"Everyone has his history."

"Of course," she returned, "and I am not going to ask for yours. You have evidently played ducks and drakes with fortune. Why don't you marry money? Let us be quite confidential. Why don't you marry Dorothea? You might do worse; she is not half bad; she has the habits of good society, thanks to me, and she has a certain income of three thousand a year, besides my poor jointure when I die. Why don't you try your chance with her? I think you have a good one."

"Poor Miss Browne!" said Leyton, laughing. "What has she done to be thrown at the head of an unworthy sinner like myself?"

"Oh, I can trust you, and I should like to do you a good turn."

"Don't trouble about me, Lady Shirland. I am a confirmed bachelor; no money would tempt me to shackle myself with the chains of holy matrimony."

"What nonsense! You cannot be nine-and-twenty."

"I assure you I have seen the end of my thirtieth year."

"I think you are mistaken. However, if you do not care for women, why are you so keen about seeing this Dallas child?"

"I never said I did not like women. I do not like the idea of marrying; that is quite another thing. Now I am going to be confidential in my turn. I daresay you will think me an idiot; if so, please do not say it, for it will check my flow of thought. You are very fond of Mrs. Dallas?"

"No, Jack, I am not very fond of anyone but myself; but I like her, and I admire her. She is pleasant to the eye, soft and sweet to the ear, and her care of poor Colonel Dallas was beyond praise. No doubt it was well worth her while; even so, we have no business with people's motives, and a woman who has the power to work long and steadily toward any particular end is deserving of respect. I certainly like her."

"Well, in the teeth of this liking, I am bold enough, or foolish enough, to fancy that she is keeping Myra Dallas against her will—that she is cutting her off deliberately from all her old friends."

"From all her old friends!" interrupted Lady Shirland.

"Why, the poor child *has* no friends. You must be out of your mind to fancy such a thing, Jack! What possible object could Mrs. Dallas have in cutting her off from her friends, if she had any? Do you know she is that poor, crazy Fred Dallas's illegitimate daughter?"

"I do," returned Leyton, in a low tone.

"Then what object *could* Mrs. Dallas have? I confess, when I heard of this wonderful act of benevolence on the part of Mrs. Dallas, I *was* a good deal puzzled; nice as she is, it did not seem quite like her; but I think I have found *le mot de l'énigme*."

"What is it, Lady Shirland?"—very earnestly.

"You know our handsome friend is quite silly about that son of hers, and an uncommonly attractive young fellow he is. Now, I believe he is determined to marry the girl. I have seen them together, and, if I am not much mistaken, he is dangerously in love with her. The mother wants to bind the boy to her by giving him the wife he wants, and thus create a home for herself; so she has taken the girl away from school to train her a little, and in a few months, no doubt, the wedding will take place. It is perhaps wise, but of a large-hearted kind of wisdom, with just a dash of sensible selfishness which makes it quite credible; yet I should have thought Mrs. Dallas was more ambitious."

"This solution satisfies you?" said Leyton, after a moment's thought.

"Doesn't it satisfy you?"

"It ought, but somehow it does not."

"Ah, that comes of cultivating your imagination till probability is too flavorless to be accepted. If you care for the future of that very interesting Miss Dallas—I even think her more than pretty—you ought to be glad there is so fair a prospect before her."

"What! to marry a brute with a dash of the tar brush!"

"My dear boy! just remember the brush *she* is tarred with!"

"No matter! There is something I do not like in the whole affair. But there is no use in talking to *you* about it, I see; only do not mention my fancies to anyone."

"Trust me! And, Jack, keep yourself disengaged next week. I will get Mrs. Dallas to fix a day to dine, and ask

you to meet the trio; closer observation would convince you." Here the footman entered.

"If you please, my lady, Sir Everard Stapleton is in the drawing room."

"Very well. I am coming directly."

"Then I will say 'Good-morning,'" said Leyton. "Remember, I will come to dinner on the shortest notice."

"Thank you! So sorry our pleasant *tête-à-tête* is interrupted! Sir Everard is rather dull, but steady and distinguished. The *very* thing for Dorothea! but she will not look at him. Good-by! Don't stay away so long in future."

CHAPTER XII.

GLIMPSES.

It was many a day since Leyton felt the elixir of life—that is, quick warm blood—coursing so rapidly through his veins as it did that morning when he left Lady Shirland, and struck northward in the direction of his own abode.

Yes! Lady Shirland was right. The shelter of a respectable home, the settled security of married life, was the best ending her friends could wish for the poor, blameless little waif, whose existence was an offense to well-behaved society; but, somehow, the idea was absolutely intolerable to Jack Leyton.

He had to the full that unreasoning contempt for Eastern humanity which is inherent in Englishmen, and is always intensified by a residence in India. He conjured up a picture of Lionel Ashby exceedingly unfavorable to that dainty youth.

Fancy painted the only son of Mrs. Dallas as very dusky indeed, with straight features and opal-colored whites to his sleepy, rolling eyes; with manners soft to cringing; a subtle intelligence, narrow and keen; and a flattering tongue, quite as ready to speak lies as the truth.

No doubt this fancy sketch differed widely from the original, but for the moment it was intensely real to Leyton. About the companion picture of Myra, there could be no mistake, however. Every line and curve of her slight, willowy figure, of her earnest, pathetic face, was graven on his memory; the peculiar repose of her attitude when she leant back in her chair—repose so complete that it suggested something of exhaustion. There was a restful composure in her every movement, not without dignity; and what improvement could anyone desire in that pale, thoughtful face, with its irregular features and rare blue eyes? Then her extreme naturalness, her way of speaking with occa-

sional pauses, as if she had thoughts to express which she could not fit with words; and when she did find them, with what eager warmth they would come. And she *did* know something of art, she had been born and brought up under its divine influence. She might not have the force, either mental or physical, to become an artist; but she had a wonderful instinct for art, a gift of true perception! That an Oriental, steeped in fleshliness from his birth, should be the husband of this delicate, lily-like English girl, whose touches of strength and conviction moved one to tenderest respect! That he should have the right to fold her in his arms, and kiss that sweet, sad-looking mouth! It was altogether an infernal desecration! Leyton thought he would willingly murder him to prevent it. "Gad! I wish I could twist his neck," he muttered half aloud. "I dare say I *could*, easily. Why, it would be better for her to marry a wandering beggar like myself, though marriage is the last folly I'd care to commit. I should be almost tempted to make the sacrifice for her sweet sake, only it would be sacrificing her, too! Heaven knows! she *may* fancy that darky fellow! Women, like her, know so little of themselves, or the life about them! For them, the men they meet are mere lay figures, which they drape with whatever colors and qualities they choose. By and by, when time and experience tear away the cloth of gold in which they have wrapped their puppets, and they see the common deal from which they have been shaped—the stiff joints, the uncouth limbs that feminine fancy has decorated with the finery of heroic tradition—no wonder there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth! If Myra should like this half-caste! But, no! I'll not believe she could, until I see this young fellow—until I see them together. Great powers, if she does! There is no use in thinking. Whether Mrs. Dallas is an angel of beneficence, or a devil of malignity, I am powerless to help Myra—*if* she wants to be helped. I imagine if she were in trouble she would turn to Mrs. Keene, or to me; and her woman's wit would suggest some means of communication. I'll go and call on Wardlaw; he hasn't been at the studio for an age."

At this point of his meditations his thoughts and steps were arrested. A gentleman suddenly stepped before him and asked;

"Are you going to cut me, Mr. Leyton?"

A moment of bewilderment on this abrupt recall from the vasty deep of thought, an exclamation of "Captain Forrester!" and the two men were shaking hands.

"I was going to call on Wardlaw," said Leyton.

"He is out of town. Come with me instead. I am on my way to Christie & Manson's. There are some old cabinets and bronzes to be sold there. I want to have a bid for them; and these things are more in your line than mine. I should be glad of your counsel."

"All right," returned Leyton, glad to get away from himself. "I don't know when I was at Christie's."

"I am going on to Tattersall's after," continued Forrester. "My hands are pretty full just now; for I have both house and stables to furnish."

"Lucky fellow to have the wherewithal to do it!"

It was late when Leyton and his new acquaintance parted. Without being actually sympathetic, they liked each other.

Both were straightforward gentlemen; and though Forrester looked on the other as decidedly insane, because he had left a poor but gentlemanlike profession for the uncertainty of daubing canvas and selling his daubs, he acknowledged to himself that society had, or thought it had, need for such fellows; and as it became him, being a man of wealth and importance, to do what was considered the right thing in his station, he was quite ready to buy Leyton's pictures on Wardlaw's recommendation, believing he had chanced on a bargain.

Though rejoicing in the possession of his deceased kinsman's fortune, Cecil Forrester liked to get the worth of his money; and was also thankful that the painter of a picture for which he had given a commission was a gentleman with whom it was not only possible but agreeable to associate.

They parted cordially, Forrester reminding Leyton of his promise to pay a visit at Wickham Hall. He was on his way to join his regiment for the last time, he said, as he expected to be released from the service in about a month, when he would let Leyton know and fix the date of his promised visit.

Late though it was, Leyton determined to look in upon

Mrs. Keene and report the ill-success of his attempt to see Myra.

"She is an honest-hearted soul I think, but, like women of her class—indeed, of all classes—she exaggerates things. As Lady Shirland says, what possible motive could Mrs. Dallas have except to humor her son? Perhaps it may be better for Myra to marry him, though I hope to Heaven she will not. I am an awful fool still. There must be a dash of the woman in me somewhere to make me a victim to these vague fears. I'm not many degrees removed from honest Mrs. Keene herself in this matter. I swear I'll think no more about it until I have seen the trio in the full light of day—I mean in full lamp-light. Fortunately, I haven't many engagements to interfere with Lady Shirland's promised invitation. Anyhow, I seem destined to return to the social world, after we had exchanged the cut direct for years. Perhaps the aftermath of life is going to be better than the first crop. No matter. Give me back the wild freshness of morning."

"Is Mrs. Keene at home?" for these reflections brought him to her door.

"Yes, sir. Please walk this way."

Mrs. Keene and Wilhelmina were at tea, and cordially welcomed Leyton, who was soon imbibing a cup of first-rate quality.

"I always like to see a gentleman fond of his tea," said Mrs. Keene, smiling on him. "It's a sign of steadiness and moderation, and that he'll make a good husband."

Here Wilhelmina giggled.

"If I can earn such a character so cheaply, I'll be a tea-drinker to the end of my days. I have not taken tea long, though. I used to like the other thing—like it very much; but when I was more on active service, I found I could do more on tea than on whisky or brandy, or even champagne."

"There, now! I am sure it is the best thing going. Well, sir—and have you seen Miss Dallas since?"

"No. I called to-day, but she was 'not at home.'"

"Ah, we all know that does not mean out."

"Right, Mrs. Keene; but it 'bars the door' as effectually."

Leyton threw an inquiring glance at Wilhelmina as he spoke.

"Oh, never fear our Willy," said Mrs. Keene in answer

to it. "She's that fond of Miss Myra she would do any mortal thing for her; and Willy's sharp, too, I can tell you. She'll not let out anything she does not choose to."

"I am sure the young lady is as wise as a serpent——"

"Law, sir, that isn't a very civil speech," said Willy.

"You did not let me finish my sentence. I was going to add, 'and harmless as a dove.'"

"I don't think that mends it," cried Wilhemina, with a pout.

"I am at the end of my ammunition," returned Leyton.

A short conversation ensued, in the course of which Mrs. Keene expressed her determination to beard the Dallas lion in her den and call upon Miss Myra herself.

"Why shouldn't I? I've often and often called on the ladies I have served."

"Why not, indeed?" echoed Leyton.

"Grandfather starts the day after to-morrow, so I'll pay my visit to-morrow evening, when he'll be here to look after the place. I am sure to find her in the evening."

"Pray do; no doubt you will see her. Remember we have no right to suppose Mrs. Dallas actuated by any but the best motives. I am afraid we have been rather fanciful on the subject."

"Maybe sir, but I am not often mistaken."

"Anyhow, be prudent with Mrs Dallas; don't let her see you think her anything less than an angel."

Wilhelmina laughed merrily, and almost immediately afterward Leyton left them.

That afternoon had been chiefly spent out of doors by Myra. Mrs. Dallas had been unusually conversational and agreeable. She had proposed an expedition to Regent Street, and on arriving there had made several small purchases, chiefly for Myra, to whom she presented a pretty jet bonnet-pin, a silk necktie, and a pair of gloves. On Myra remonstrating with her for so much generosity, Mrs. Dallas remarked that she considered her a daughter, toward whom generosity should be only limited by means. "Besides," added the affectionate widow, "my dear boy is doing so well that I have less need to care for him. I hope that before long he may be taken into partnership in the firm where he is now clerk. Your dear, kind uncle gave me the means to place him in that position, and he has but

to prove his business qualities: these he undoubtedly possesses."

It was a nice bright day. The shops looked lovely, and the full tide of busy life flowing through the streets had an electric effect on Myra's young blood. After all, her aunt *did* like her; she was genuinely kind. Myra was more than half ashamed of the doubts and distrust which had eaten into her heart that morning.

At last it was time to return. As they stood waiting for an omnibus (Mrs. Dallas hated walking—and omnibuses too, for that matter—only she preferred twopenny to eighteen-penny fares) she looked into her (portemonnaie and asked, "Have you any pence, Myra?"

"Me!" cried Myra, opening her eyes and laughing. "I think I have one halfpenny, but I left it home; I did not like to carry my whole capital about with me."

Mrs. Dallas laughed, too. "I must change a shilling, then. I suppose I ought to give you an allowance, Myra, just for pocket-money."

"You do so much for me as it is," said Myra, coloring.

"Ah, well, it is not pleasant to be quite without money."

Here the omnibus came up, and the conversation ended. Myra, however, felt at once cheered and remorseful. Her aunt was evidently going to take away one source of uneasiness; she was really mean and suspicious to doubt her, but, oh! how she wished she could earn some pocket-money. Surely she might! She would pluck up courage and speak to her aunt about it, now she had broken the ice.

Aunt and niece spent a tranquil evening. Mrs. Dallas asked Myra to read aloud to her. She had borrowed a novel of fashionable life from Dorothea, and wanted to finish it, she said. It was a good substitute for conversation, and Myra's voice was soothing.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Dallas lay on the soft sofa and thought, undisturbed by any deep interest in the story.

At last Myra grew sleepy, and imagined her aunt was similarly affected. She laid down the volume, and stifling a yawn, exclaimed:

"They are all most uninteresting people, and seem to be quite unnatural. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, quite"—in a tone of conviction. "I am a little

sleepy; I really think I must have a cup of tea. Ring the bell, dear; we miss Lionel very much when he is out."

"You will not think of sitting up for him?"

"Oh, no; yet he is rarely late, and one must not be too strict with boys."

"I am sure, aunt, Lionel does just as he likes."

"Ah, I must confess he is my idol. What would I not sacrifice for him? Whoever *he* loves is dear to me."

Myra colored deeply at the significance of her tone, and felt thankful for the occupation of putting out the tea and seeking for the sugar-basin.

"I fear he will not be able to accompany us on our travels," continued Mrs. Dallas.

"I suppose it is not easy for him to get away," remarked Myra.

"No, but he must have a holiday soon. He is looking very ill."

"Do you think so? I have not observed——"

"Why, my dear Myra, he is pale and thin, and his eyes quite sunken," in a slightly indignant tone.

"You are too anxious about him, my dear aunt. Of course a mother will see more than anyone else!"

"I am not a weak fool, Myra."

"You, a fool! No, indeed; but you are very fond of Lionel." Mrs. Dallas sighed, and an uneasy, fretted look came into her face.

"Ah, here is the tea! Put the tray on that little table near the fire. I never wanted a cup so much."

A few minutes silence ensued, while Myra officiated and Mrs. Dallas drank her tea. "It is very nice to have you here to 'pour out' for me," she resumed with a soft smile. "I used to be so lonely when Lionel was out, and one cannot tie a young man to one's apron strings."

"No! I suppose men get tired of being with women."

"*Very* tired, sometimes." Another pause, then, as if speaking out of thoughts, and gazing away as if at something unseen by her companion, "I am so glad that Miss Browne did not succeed in fascinating him!"

"I thought you would have been pleased if he had married her," exclaimed Myra, a little bewildered.

"At one time I might have been. I have seen more of her since. She is a nice, dear creature, of course; but she

is really too old for him, and too rich; there is no happiness in inequality, and I only care for my boy's real happiness. Then, of course, Mr. Leyton is more suited to Dorothea in many ways. I wonder when they will be married?"

"Are they engaged, then?" asked Myra with interest.

"Not openly as yet, but from what Lady Shirland told me, I should think it would soon be announced."

"What a beautiful studio he will have then," returned Myra with a sigh. "I do love a studio."

"You will enjoy the galleries abroad!" Mrs. Dallas proceeded to talk of her projected tour, and Myra entered heartily into her plans; in truth, the only point of light and hope on her horizon, sparkled in the prospect of escape from her present surroundings, to new scenes and circumstances. Why, she could hardly say.

"Shall we be anywhere near Munich?" she asked when Mrs. Dallas had paused in her counting of the cost.

"I shall be very pleased to spend a few days there, if you wish."

"It would be heavenly!" ejaculated Myra, stretching out her hand for her aunt's cup.

Mrs. Dallas looked at it with a sudden slight knitting of her fine dark brows, and then asked carelessly, "You don't wear the ring your poor uncle gave you now, Myra?"

"No, it is rather loose for me, and I am afraid to lose it. I suppose I am growing thin, like Lionel."

Mrs. Dallas smiled. "Perhaps you both need the same remedy. You had better let me get it reset for you. It would be far handsomer in a good setting."

"Thank you so much, dear aunt. I like it best as it is."

"Well, don't leave it about."

"Certainly not! I have put it safely away."

Mrs. Dallas became very still and silent. Myra rang to have the things removed, and then took up the novel again; still Mrs. Dallas did not speak. At last she looked up, and said, "I am dreadfully tired and sleepy; let us go to bed."

Myra was rather glad to be alone. As it was early, she rearranged some drawers, which were not exactly in good order; and then took out her little work-box, intending to put in a needful stitch or two before going to bed. There was, however, only the empty reel which had held white cotton, and she was obliged to postpone her mending.

To-morrow she must ask her aunt for cotton, and Mrs. Dallas, who hated and despised plain work, was always badly supplied with such materials. She should like to go out and buy some, but to do so was impossible, unless she asked Mrs. Dallas for a few pence, and that was too painful. She had been so nice all that day, too! If she were in earnest in her promise of an allowance—and why should she (Myra) doubt her?—it would be so comfortable! but better still would be the power of earning for herself. Oh, how degrading dependence is, even when leavened with love! and Mrs. Dallas loved her. She must love her, to take upon herself the burden of her maintenance; and yet—and yet, where was the answering “Yes” of her own heart? Why did it not go out in warm, unquestioning gratitude to her benefactress? “How I wish she had not asked about that ring!” thought Myra, when she had put out her light; and a vivid picture of the first time her aunt had offered to have that ring reset rose before her. *Then* she looked on Mrs. Dallas as a cruel foe who had stood between her and the uncle she had been inclined to love so dearly, in whose kind, handsome face her father’s seemed reflected. How often her heart had swelled with a passionate desire to throw herself into his arms, and ask him to let her be as his daughter! but Mrs. Dallas was ever near with cold, scornful eyes, to hold the sword of determined opposition between them. Yes! she well remembered that day. It was one of the rare holidays she spent in her uncle’s house, and more than two years ago.

It was the 18th of September, and her uncle had asked her how old she was. She said—“Just seventeen. This is my birthday. I know Hedwig always gave me cake on the eighteenth, because it was my birthday.”

Then her uncle said:

“Well, I must give you something, too.”

He went away to his study, or sanctum, and brought the ring.

Mrs. Dallas said that money would be more useful; but Myra had begged to keep it. Whereupon Mrs. Dallas offered to have it reset. Lionel, who was beginning to be troublesome about that time, was sitting on the sofa behind his mother, had made a gesture and given a look out of his big black eyes which said “Refuse” even more dis-

tinctly than words could. She refused, not because of this warning, but because she wished to keep her uncle's gift just as it was, and so she would always keep it; but, oh! how she wished to forget these details! What would she not give for the rest of complete trust, especially when her faith in Jack Leyton had received a rude shock—for it did seem dreadful that he should marry Dorothea Browne? She was so funny, so "made up," body and mind—a sort of human palimpsest—where one artificial writing after another had been superimposed upon the totally obliterated original text. Oh, how could a true man, an artist, take such a mass of oddity and flightiness for his life's companion? And Jack seemed so real—even ruggedly real—himself. What spell had fallen upon him?

Well, he was the one old friend she had—the one companion memory with whom she could hold communion—and he was lost, for Dorothea's husband could never be her friend again. He would be pervaded by the unreality which made intercourse with that susceptible damsel such a weariness both of flesh and spirit. Mentally she said good-by to Jack; she did not even wish to see him again. Ultimately she fell asleep, with a hearty wish that she might return to the somewhat sordid independence of Ruby Lodge and the trying task of endeavoring to instill German and music into the unreceptive minds of the good-humored girls who were more her companions than her pupils.

It seemed to her that she had slept long and heavily when she suddenly woke with an odd, frightened sensation of fear and danger. The sound of voices grew upon her as she listened in unaccountable terror. They were not near, not beside her, and came to her as if muffled by some intervening substance. As her senses grew clearer, she knew it was Mrs. Dallas speaking in her own room, which was next to Myra's—speaking not very loudly, but with deliberate firmness. The answering voice was Lionel's, high-pitched, full of fury, with the echo of a curse in every syllable. She could not catch the words; she did not try, save that once something like an appeal to "all the devils in hell" penetrated to her understanding. A scornful laugh followed, and then a door was slammed with such violence that the whole house shook. Profound silence followed,

and it must be confessed that Myra hid her head under the bed-clothes.

What could it mean? Was it midnight or morning? She had no watch; she could not ascertain. Could it be possible that Lionel and his mother had quarreled, *could* quarrel so bitterly? That Lionel had a violent temper, or used to have a violent temper, she was well aware. When first she came to London and he was still at the London University, he used to have paroxysms of rage, which partly disgusted, partly frightened her. Of late years he had always seemed amiable and good-humored, and she might have even liked him had he been less oppressively attentive, that she could never quite get rid of that first impression of violence and cruelty. But that he should speak in such a brutal tone to his mother amazed and horrified her.

What mystery was gathering round her? Was she never to be able to guide her own life? She would rather go forth to earn her living as a servant than live as she did, bound with invisible cords, groping blindly with bandaged eyes, ignorant of the forces at work upon her destiny. There was no more sleep for her, but silence and stillness gradually soothed her strained nerves.

When the breakfast bell summoned her next morning, there were no signs of a fray. Mrs. Dallas was looking paler than usual.

"Lionel was obliged to leave quite early this morning," she said, in explanation of his non-appearance; "and I am afraid you must have been startled last night by the noise of a door shutting violently. I was. I fancy it must have been next door."

"Oh, yes; it quite frightened me," said Myra, instinctively speaking in a careless tone. "I lay awake a long time after."

"Not before?" asked Mrs. Dallas.

But the entrance of the servant with some letters saved her from the necessity of a reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DECLARATION.

LIONEL did not make his appearance at dinner that day either; and, in spite of her self-control, Mrs. Dallas looked anxious, and was even restless.

The two ladies were sitting together after dinner. Myra, at her aunt's request, had gone to the piano, and was playing some airs from ear or memory, when the servant entered, to say Mrs. Keene had called, and wished to know if she could see Miss Dallas.

"Mrs. Keene!" exclaimed Myra joyously, rising and moving toward the door.

"Mrs. Keene!" echoed her aunt. "Let her come in. I wonder what she wants?"

Myra remained standing, and when her good friend entered, greeted her cordially with a kiss, whereat a frown and a scornful expression passed over Mrs. Dallas's face.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am," said Mrs. Keene, addressing the lady of the house, "but it is so long since I heard anything of Miss Myra, I thought I would just call to ask if you had gone abroad."

"Not yet, as you see," returned Mrs. Dallas with cheerful politeness. "Sit down, Mrs. Keene, and tell us your news."

"Well, my dear young lady, are you keeping quite well?"

"Oh, yes! *quite*. And is Mr. Keene himself again?"

"He is, miss, and quite happy, for he's off for three months to-morrow. I'm sure he'll never rest as long as he has a leg to stand on."

"And Wilhelmina?"

"She has a bad cold, but she's going down to my sister's. They live at Redworth; it's a very pretty country, and fine air. My sisters have a stationer's business and circulating library; very highly respectable business, I assure you. It was my poor father's, and I might have had my

share, if I hadn't had a wandering fit and *would* go traveling."

Then there was a pause. Mrs. Dallas was perfectly civil, but it was impossible to do more than "make" conversation under the watchful gaze of her eyes. A wild wish to carry Mrs. Keene away to the privacy of her own room flashed across Myra's mind, but she hesitated, and was lost.

"We hope to begin our travels in about a month," said Mrs. Dallas. "I assure you we look forward to it with great pleasure, we both need change. Don't you think Miss Dallas is looking pale and drooping?"

"To my mind, ma'am, she seems brighter than when last I saw her."

Then Mrs. Dallas inquired about the hotel and its success, and the system of management pursued by Mrs. Keene, paying her many compliments on her energy and powers of organization. So the talk dribbled on wearily. Mrs. Keene's eyes frequently sought Myra's with anxious, inquiring looks, but it was all in vain. They might as well be miles apart for all the comfort they derived from this interview.

At last Mrs. Keene took leave. "Maybe you will come to see me, Miss Myra, before you go away," she said, as she took her hand.

"Oh, yes! we will pay you a visit, certainly," replied Mrs. Dallas.

"God bless you! my dear young lady," said Mrs. Keene, adding so low that Myra guessed the word more from the motion of her lips, than from any sound she heard, "Come!"

"A very good sort of woman," was Mrs. Dallas's comment, as the door closed upon her. "But, Myra, you'll find this sort of friendship with a woman of her class tiresome and inconvenient."

"I cannot believe that," returned Myra, with a sigh. "I am nothing so great myself that I can afford to throw away the friendship of a true heart."

"You must not undervalue yourself, my dear. One of these days, when you have a smart young husband, you will not care to have your evenings broken in upon by the visits of the landlady of Keene's Private Hotel."

"That is very improbable," returned Myra quietly.

"Why should it be improbable? Have you no ambition?"

"How could I?" cried Myra with an unusual outburst of spirit, "when my life has been one long teaching of my own insignificance, at least since I lost my father!"

"You are not insignificant to *me*, dear child."

"No! *You* are very good, but I cannot unlearn the old lesson quickly."

"Ah, Myra, you will find out how important you are some day."

Sweet words to a young ear, but, somehow, Myra's was not attuned to them. Yet she felt so weary of the strife in her own mind between trust and distrust, that she resolved to throw her doubts to the wind for peace sake, and try to enjoy herself.

Doubt and dullness are so abhorrent to the young, well may they cling to the brightness of anticipation; for if they did not believe in the mirage which merciful Nature spreads before them, how could they keep up their hearts through the stony desert across which we toil?

The following day was Saturday, and Lionel returned to the bosom of his family. He did not look very bright, but he made himself as pleasant as he could, and seemed on the best of terms with his mother.

In the course of the evening he mentioned that he had an invitation to dine and sleep on the following Tuesday at the country house of the head of his firm, a very fine gentleman indeed; perhaps he might stay till Thursday—he would if he were pressed. It was a pleasant house. There were two or three bright, amusing daughters, etc., etc.

Then he produced a new song he had brought with him, which he and Myra agreed was not worth the trouble of learning. Altogether he was very nice and brotherly, and Myra thought how much more quickly the evening went when he was at home.

The season was rapidly swelling to high-water mark, and Dorothea Browne lived in a busy whirl, which quite swallowed up her benevolent intentions toward Myra. It was almost ten days since she had seen the charming widow or her niece, and when Mrs. Dallas and Myra called on the Sunday following Mrs. Keene's visit, they only found Lady Shirland, who welcomed them warmly. It was a pleasant

visit to Myra, who found herself near a nice fatherly sort of gray-haired man, one of several callers, who talked to her, and Myra was by no means shy when interested. The talk gradually turned on books and pictures, so Myra grew animated and the color came to her cheeks. These indications did not escape Mrs. Dallas, who grew more convinced that there were many chambers in Myra's mind to be explored.

"Who is that young lady?" asked the elderly gentleman, who was a well known essayist, when Mrs. Dallas carried off her niece.

Lady Shirland told her name.

"She is unusually intelligent and natural for so young a girl. I suspect she has the making of a charming woman."

While, as they walked toward home, Mrs. Dallas thought it as well to warn Myra.

"I am always pleased to see you amused, dear, but perhaps it would be wiser not to talk so freely to a total stranger."

"What, only about pictures, and books, and things of that kind? It is such a relief!" cried Myra.

"Still, it is not quite prudent," persisted Mrs. Dallas.

"How tiresome everything is!" returned Myra, with some irritation; and lapsed into a mental repetition of her new acquaintance's piquant remarks and clever observations, while her aunt delivered a neat little lecture on the necessity of caution, reticence, and circumspection on the part of the young which nearly lasted to their own door.

It was curious to notice the affect which any individual action on the part of Myra produced on Mrs. Dallas. So long as her niece was quiescent, silent, inamimate, she felt a certain degree of faint liking for her; but directly Myra enunciated an opinion or showed the slightest desire or ability to stand alone, a tyrannical determination to reduce her to dependence, mental and physical, sprang to fierce life in her aunt's mind, and demanded her suppression.

"I suppose we need not expect to see Lionel till tomorrow," said Mrs. Dallas, as they sat at luncheon the following Wednesday. "He promised to telegraph to me if he were to return to dinner, so I have not ordered any. I am going to leave you all alone, dear, for which you must forgive me. I have, for a wonder, promised to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Deedes this evening. He has been fright-

fully overworked of late, so we are going to have some business talk in the evening."

"Of course, aunt, you would not mind me. I have another book—an old volume of Sir Walter Scott—which Mrs. Dwyer lent me, which——"

"Mrs. Dwyer!" repeated Mrs. Dallas. "How did she come to lend you a book?"

"I asked her for one yesterday when she came in to wind the clock; you were upstairs. You don't give me enough to do, aunt, so I always want something to read."

"Show me the book," said Mrs. Dallas peremptorily.

Myra at once brought her a well-thumbed volume which lay on a table between the windows.

Mrs. Dallas turned over the pages slowly with keen attention, while she thought, "If there was anything between the leaves, of course it has been taken out; but she would not have been such a fool as to call my attention to it, if——"

"'Old Mortality,'" she said aloud. "I believe it is considered one of his best, but I don't care much for novels myself."

"I love them!" returned Myra. "I forget everything but the story while I am reading, and that is a comfort!"

"Is your life so unhappy then, Myra?"

"I have made rather an ungrateful speech," said Myra penitently; "but I confess it is painful to be a burden even on the kindest relative!"

"Nonsense, child! Besides, you do not know what good fortune fate may have stored up for you in the shape of a rich husband."

"I should not like to be a burden on him either, aunt."

"What! are you going to set up as a strong-minded woman, Myra?"

"Oh, I wish I were strong-minded! but I am woefully weak."

"Anything is better than being obstinate."

When Mrs. Dallas set out to dine with her solicitor, which she did rather early, as he lived at some distance, Myra felt an odd sort of relief at being alone and free. It was strange what a sense of being watched had grown upon her! It was ungrateful and unreasonable to feel like this, but there was the feeling, and she would not exhaust her-

self arguing about it. So she took her book and lost herself in its interest, till it was too dark to read any more by the fading light.

Then she lit the lamp and made up the fire. While doing so, it struck her that it was a good opportunity to write a few lines to dear, kind Mrs. Keene, just to assure her that all was well. "For indeed," said Myra to herself, "I have nothing to complain of, and that will relieve her mind. I have no stamp, nor a penny to buy one, but she will not mind paying twopence for the information. Mrs. Dwyer will post it for me. Perhaps I ought not to ask her. But, oh, I will! I know Mrs. Keene is anxious about me. When will my aunt give me the pocket-money she talked of? at all events, I cannot ask her."

She went to the writing table, and had just opened the blotting book, when the sound of the door handle turning made her look round.

She found herself face to face with Lionel. It was startling, but she did not much mind, for of late he had been very quiet and undemonstrative.

"O Lionel! I did not think you would have come back till to-morrow?"

"I had intended to stay a day longer, but I felt dull; I had a headache, and a fit of homesickness. Where is my mother?"

"She is dining out!"

"You don't mean it! Wonders will never cease! Pray, where?"

"With Mr. and Mrs. Deedes; and I am afraid there is no dinner for you, Lionel."

"It is no matter. I had a late luncheon."

"Then you would like a cup of tea?"

"Thank you. I would rather have a B. and S."

"Tea would be better for you."

"I don't think so." He rang the bell, and went to take out the cognac from the sideboard. Myra was sitting in the dining room. Having despatched the desired beverage, Lionel declared himself much refreshed.

"How nice and bright and homelike it looks here!" he exclaimed, throwing himself into an easy chair by the fire; while Myra resumed hers beside the table which held the lamp, and took up her knitting, feeling dreadfully annoyed

at this interruption to the free, peaceful evening she had hoped to enjoy.

Silence ensued. Myra's eyes were bent upon her work, but the sense of being watched compelled her to raise them. They met Lionel's, which were fixed upon her with an expression which at once angered and frightened her; but she could find no words wherewith to rebuke him.

"It is quite heavenly to sit here alone with you, Myra!" he exclaimed at last. "I wish my mother would never come back, then we could be by ourselves always!"

"For shame!" said Myra warmly, "to speak so ungratefully of your mother, who loves you dearly, and only lives for you! Why are you so worthless?"

"Because," returned Lionel in a deep, quiet voice, and still leaning back in his chair—"because I should not care if all the world were swept away, if I only had you all to myself!"

Myra felt very vexed with him; but she had been accustomed to his almost boyish outbreaks in former days, and she did not perceive the force, the determined passion in his tone.

"I wish you would not talk like that, Lionel; it is very disagreeable! Why did you not stay and flirt with those young ladies your mother says are so fond of you?"

"Pah!" exclaimed the young man, starting up and pacing the room. "The thought of any woman but yourself makes me sick! I was always in love with you! Long ago, I used not to think about you when you were out of my sight, but I used to fall in love over again whenever I saw you! And you were so hard and cold; the woman's heart in you had not woke up. Will it ever wake? Then I knew my mother was harsh to you, and accused you of mischief unjustly—why don't you love me, Myra?"

"I am sure I don't know, Lionel!" she returned, more moved than she had ever been by the tremor in his voice, the trouble in his eyes. "I am sorry to cause you any worry; but I really don't think I could fall in love with you or anyone! There are heaps of nice girls, much nicer than I am, who might be very fond of you, because *you* are nice too!"

"It is utterly cruel of you to talk in that distracting way. You cannot picture to yourself what I feel. I tell

you, Myra, if you will not be my wife—if you will not love me, and come to me and kiss me—I'll die!" He threw himself on his knee beside her, and tried to put his arms round her waist.

"Have you lost your senses, Lionel?" indignantly, as she pushed back her chair and rose to her feet. "You only pain me by this folly. You ought to see it *is* folly. And how could we marry? You have no money, and I have no money. Your mother would be furious if she thought you asked me."

"Don't tell her, then," with a smile and cunning look, as he too stood up and leant on the back of a high chair.

"Yes, Lionel; I will tell her to-morrow morning. It is not right to hide anything from her; and I cannot live here if I am to cause pain to you and trouble to your mother."

"My mother will agree to *anything* I set my heart upon."

"But *I* will not, Lionel. There is no use in talking any longer, it is only distressing to us both. I shall say good-night now."

She gathered up her knitting with a decided air, and turned toward the door.

Quick as thought young Ashby sprang to it turned the key, and put it in his pocket.

Myra stood mute with astonishment.

"Lionel," she exclaimed at last, "how dare you! Open that door at once!"

"Not unless you promise to hear all I have to say."

"I will not listen to a word if you do not open that door; and I shall call Mrs. Dwyer."

Though Myra felt strangely frightened and extremely angry, she kept a cool, determined front. "If I open it, will you stay and hear me?"

"Yes; but it must be open. Then you can say what you like."

Lionel hesitated, and then put the key in the lock, opened the door a little, and resumed:

"You do not know what you are refusing now, Myra. I shall be well off—better off than you dream—and you shall share all I possess. Then you will be free and independent. You shall be my queen—no longer poor and

lonely. Oh, Myra, Why *don't* you see that there is nothing left for you but to be my wife!"

"I don't see it at all, Lionel; and, indeed, you would be very sorry if I were. I couldn't make you happy, because I should not be happy myself. Remember that, and just put it out of your mind."

"I cannot—and I will not!" cried Lionel. "Do not make me hate as well as love you. You *shall* be my wife—nothing shall keep you from me! Don't force me to be cruel to you, for I can and will be. Listen, Myra. You treat me as a foolish boy. You will find me more than you can resist. I am resolved you shall be my wife—my own, and none other's; and you shall kiss me now—a foretaste of all I shall have hereafter."

He made a bold attempt to catch her in his arms; but she was too quick for him.

With a sharp, angry cry of "Never!" she eluded his grasp, and, darting upstairs to her own room, securely locked the door.

Safe in her own sanctum, she sat down to meditate on this strange outbreak.

It had always been annoying to her to be the object of what she considered his insolent attentions; but she never gave him credit for a serious attachment. His vehemence and audacity offended and alarmed her. Hitherto, as he said, she had thought of him and treated him as a foolish boy. Now there was something in his eyes—his voice—that impressed her with a sense of danger.

A shudder passed through her. She strove to resist the feeling; she despised herself for such weakness. What harm could happen to her? Lionel had a violent temper, and was vexed with her. He would forget his threats next day. Then her aunt would be against him. Perhaps she would see it was better that he and Myra should not be in the same house, and might send her away—not angrily, but as a measure of precaution. Surely she (Myra) might at least find food and shelter *somewhere* as a nursery governess! She was surprised to find that her heart leapt at the thought.

She was quite unambitious. Her young life had been so sad, so harassed, so lonely, that anything like certainty—peace, the sense of being of use to someone, dear to some-

one—seemed like a prospect of heaven. She could not—no, strive as she would, she could *not*—find the smallest sense of home in her aunt's house. Something of peace and security clung round the idea of Jack Leyton; but he was virtually lost to her. She would probably never see him again; and she hardly regretted this.

So she dropped asleep—a vague dream of escaping; of having a desperate struggle to find hat and cloak; of finally running away without them; of being pursued and overtaken by Lionel; and, finally, wakening just as he grasped her arm.

It was daylight, and Myra thought she had been dreaming the whole night through; at all events, she felt as tired as if she had.

When Mrs. Dallas returned from dining (wherever she had dined), she found her son pacing the dining room with hasty steps. His face was white, his eyes burning.

She stood a moment contemplating him, and slowly untied and removed her bonnet.

"You are unsuccessful, I see," she said quietly.

"Unsuccessful!—yes. That girl has driven me almost mad. She has no feeling—no blood in her veins, only half-frozen water. She treated me with disdain. Why is she different from other women? She fled from me as if I were loathsome. Can it be that she despises the strain of Eastern blood in my veins?"

A flash of indignant light shot from his mother's eyes.

"If so, I shall tell her the facts about her *own* birth. But, Lionel, are you *sure* it was not stupid shyness or girlish coquetry that made her refuse you?"

"It is personal aversion," he returned bitterly, as he threw himself on the sofa. "She shrinks from my touch. She raises the devil in me. I love her, I thirst for her, yet I want to trample her under my feet."

"This is folly, Lionel; you must be cool, resolute, reasonable. You *shall* have this girl anyhow; but if you will be guided by *me* you have her pleasantly. Tell me what passed."

Lionel recapitulated what had passed with tolerable accuracy, growing calmer as he spoke. Mrs. Dallas listened with profound attention.

"The game, to be thoroughly well played, needs more

time than we can give to it," she said. "You are not slow and sentimental enough for the silly girl, but what she wants or wishes is of small importance. You *must* be patient and prudent. Ask her pardon to-morrow, and undertake to be brotherly and all that sort of thing; then get her to give you a chance of winning her. We will get her abroad, and once in our own hands, away from all possibility of interference, it will go hard if we do not manage, without brutality of any kind, to compromise her in some way and make her willing enough to be your wife. Of course, we'll try fair means first; but, fair or foul, she shall be your wife before three months are over."

Something in the quiet determination of his mother's manner made Lionel for the moment believe that all things were possible to her.

"I will act as you advise," he said, readily enough. "One thing I am nearly sure of—she doesn't care about any other fellow. I do not think it is in her to care for any one."

"So much the better for her future husband. Women of that kind are gentle, submissive, and satisfied with little."

"I don't think you understand Myra Dallas."

"I sometimes doubt if I do. I sometimes catch glimpses of obstinacy, of stubborn truthfulness,—she would call it integrity,—and then I hate her."

"Ay, but you shall do her no harm," ejaculated Lionel, looking distrustfully at his mother. "No one shall hurt her save myself."

"You are a silly boy!"—contemptuously; "you say Myra is afraid I should be displeased at the idea of a marriage between you two. If she makes a confession to me, what line shall I adopt—approval or disapproval?"

"I don't know; what do you think? Which would forward our plans best?"

"Disapproval might answer best, but it would be a waiting game; we cannot spare the time. If she speaks to me to-morrow, I shall act on the inspiration of the moment; and you, Lionel—you must apologize and explain, but in writing; don't trust yourself in an interview. Come, it is not late; let us compose a touching epistle. Leave it on the breakfast table, and I'll send your coffee and toast to your

room; you had better not meet in the morning. Tiresome girl! why does she give so much trouble?"

The letter took some time and the spoiling of several sheets of paper.

When it was finished and addressed, there was a brief pause. Then Mrs. Dallas said in a low voice:

"I can *not* make out what she has done with that ring."

"Can't you find it?" asked Lionel.

"No. I have looked through everything she possesses—lodging house locks are not difficult—and it is not to be found. If she had lost it at school one could understand, but she had it since she came here, and I am afraid to make any stir about it lest it might suggest suspicion. Suspicion may sleep for ages, but once awakened, it is sleepless."

CHAPTER XIV.

A PAUSE UPON THE BRINK.

WHEN Myra descended next morning, she was surprised to find a letter on her plate, a letter addressed in an unknown hand, and unstamped. She was the first to appear, and took the opportunity of opening it:

DEAREST MYRA, [it ran] I cannot sleep without humbling myself before you, and asking your pardon for my outburst this evening. I know it was startling to you, and unbecoming in me. All I can urge in excuse is a state of mind you cannot, perhaps, understand. I have loved you so long, so fondly, that I could not resist staking my all on one throw, and lost self-control when I felt the cruel stabs of your indifference. But, Myra, do not quite turn from me, only give me a chance of recovering your esteem. I swear I will strive to be worthy of you; I swear to control myself. I ask no return, unless, indeed, I am so blessed, as to win your affection! I will try to be as a brother to you, if you will treat me with kindness—mere friendly kindness. You will help me to recover myself, for I have not been as prudent or steady as I ought to be. I ask for no reply to this; a word, a look when we next meet will be enough; only forgive me, and help me to reach a higher standard. I do not want you to commit yourself to anything, only believe in the devoted love of yours.

LIONEL ASHBY.

“Poor Lionel! I did not think he could write so well! in such a good spirit. If I can help him I shall be delighted, of course; but I am afraid I could never like to marry him. I almost wish I could! but, no, it is impossible.” Here Mrs. Dallas came in. Myra did not offer her the letter, but she let it lie openly on the breakfast table.

That meal was discussed almost in silence. When the breakfast things were removed, Mrs. Dallas retired to an armchair with the newspaper, as was her wont. Myra moved about a little uneasily; she watered the ferns in the window, and put some coals on the fire, and then stood looking irresolutely at her aunt, who was half hidden behind

the *Daily Telegraph*. At last with a sudden effort she exclaimed, "When you have quite done with the paper, I want to speak to you?"

"Certainly!" said Mrs. Dallas laying aside her paper, "I am always ready to hear whatever you have to say, my dear."

"Thank you!" returned Myra growing red and white. Then she hesitated and resumed, "This," holding it up, "is from Lionel. I want to tell you all about it."

"By all means, tell me everything! draw that low chair beside me." Myra, much encouraged, obeyed Mrs. Dallas.

"Did you see Lionel last night?"

"No! He had gone to bed when I came in," replied her aunt, gazing straight into her eyes.

"Well, aunt, he came back quite early—about eight o'clock, I think—and we talked, and—and—I am afraid you will be very vexed—but he—asked me to marry him, and was rather angry because I said I could not, that it would be wrong to vex *you*. Then he was awfully angry, so I grew frightened, and ran away. I found this letter when I came down, and it is a very nice one. I must show it to you. You see he is very good, and is going to be sensible, so he will soon forget his fancy for me. I really do not wish to marry him; but if I did I would not, because it would be ungrateful to you, as——"

While she spoke Mrs. Dallas had been looking through Lionel's letter, and now she interrupted Myra with a deep sigh. "My poor boy!" she said. "Yes, it *is* a good letter. Ah, Myra, my heart aches for him! I know how deeply his love for you is rooted in his heart. I confess that while I was under a false impression respecting you, I was very strongly opposed to the idea of his marrying you; but now that I *know* you, now that you have lived with me, and I see your worth, my views are changed. I, too, thought Lionel's was a mere boyish passing fancy. This," touching the paper, "is the letter of a *man*—a resolute, true-hearted man. A marriage with you may not be wise from a worldly point of view, but after all, happiness is the first consideration, and I see you are essential to Lionel's; therefore, my dear Myra, I retract all my objections, or, rather, they have been removed so completely

that I wish you to become my son's wife. Can I prove my regards for you more strongly?"

"No, indeed," said Myra, touched and surprised, but also infinitely distressed. "I am sure it is more than I could have expected, and I am very grateful to you; but, aunt, you must understand that—that—I don't know how it is, I am sure Lionel is nice and pleasant, and good-looking, but I don't think I *could* marry him, and I do not think he would like me as a wife—afterward, I mean."

"Do not be obstinate and unreasonable, Myra! You have, no doubt, accustomed your mind to consider marriage with Lionel impossible, because it would be displeasing to me. If you think of all the advantages it would secure to you—a happy, secure home—for, though I am not rich, I have a competency, which I will share with you, and the ample repayment it would be to me for any service I have done you, to see my dear boy rescued by a wife, such as his soul desires, from the dangers and temptations of early bachelorhood."

"I am sure I wish I could," murmured Myra, with an air of hesitation which misled Mrs. Dallas.

"Do not decide anything, my love," she said soothingly. "Let things go on, on their old footing. Give Lionel the chance of winning you, and——"

"Of course, I should like to please you," interrupted Myra earnestly; "but if, after a while, I am still of the same mind, do not say I deceived you both or misled you. Indeed, aunt, it would be wiser to let me go back to school; or, if Mrs. Fairchild would not have me, Lady Shirland might find me some employment, which would be a relief to you and more independent for me."

"What!" cried Mrs. Dallas in angry astonishment. "Would you prefer drudgery to the comforts and repose of my home—the position of Lionel's wife?"

Regular work was an abomination to her sensuous, indolent nature, though to gain any especial purpose she could make strong and even continuous efforts.

"Idleness is even more tiresome than drudgery—though I am neither strong nor diligent—but latterly I have not cared to sit and dream as I used. I want more to be up and doing. I wish I could work—really work—in some studio and learn. I might earn money by and by—money

enough to pay for the cost of teaching. But that would be a mere chance, so there is no use in speaking about it."

"There is not, indeed," said Mrs. Dallas harshly. She had great difficulty in hiding the indignation Myra's words had raised. "I suppose you would like to study with Mr. Leyton?" she added, with an irrepressible sneer.

It was lost upon Myra, who was taken up with her own hopes and fears.

"Yes; very much," she replied quietly. "He can teach very well; but I suppose when he is married he will have a lovely studio and not let anyone but himself work in it."

"Very likely," said Mrs. Dallas.

Something in Myra's tone allayed her irritation; and she said to herself, "If she is perfectly free from any liking—any preposterous fancy for another—Lionel must succeed by fair means; and they are best."

"Well, dear," she resumed softly, "have patience. Follow my advice for a short time—a few weeks—and then, if both Lionel and myself prove intolerable, why, you may go and work to your heart's content—if you can get work to do."

"Yes; that is not so easy, I know. I shall, of course, do what you wish, only then you must not be angry if—if I do go away."

"Oh, no," returned Mrs. Dallas dryly.

"Thank you. You are really too good to me," said Myra warmly; then she rose, hesitated, and left the room.

Myra hesitated because she felt that a kindly kiss would have been the appropriate end of their conversation; but, curiously enough, though at times her heart warmed to Mrs. Dallas sufficiently to reproach its owner with coldness and ingratitude, it never incited her to offer her aunt a caress; and Myra was too much guided by impulses—in fact, she rarely disobeyed them.

Mrs. Dallas looked after her when the door was shut. Her face darkened, and she murmured:

"Fool! How can she hesitate? Ignorant as she is, it must seem to her like casting away high fortune. If she hesitates much longer, I will tell her that she is indeed base-borne—that few men would seek in marriage a girl who bears the stamp of shame. If she knew all! But I must take care. What does she want? What can she

want? She seems utterly transparent; yet I cannot fathom her. Why trouble about it or what she wills or wishes? She is friendless, helpless, penniless, and in my hands."

It was with no small trepidation that Myra came down to dinner that day. Lionel was already in the drawing room; but Mrs. Dallas had not yet appeared when Myra opened the door. Lionel did not rush to meet her with his usual *empressement*. He made a step or two forward as she advanced, and said in a quiet, ordinary tone:

"Good evening, Myra. Come near the fire." He drew a chair for her, but did not offer to shake hands. "It is quite cold," he continued. "I hate the climate, and should almost like to return to India."

Myra felt a sort of relief, but scarcely knew how to reply.

"I think," she said with some embarrassment, "that the long evenings make the cold seem more dreary."

"Probably." Then, after a short pause, he said softly, "Are we to be friends, Myra?"

"Oh, yes; I shall be very glad," she returned almost eagerly.

"Thank you," was his brief reply; and before they could exchange another word Mrs. Dallas joined them.

Dinner passed over almost easily. Both mother and son exerted themselves to talk on various general topics, which assisted Myra to regain her self-possession; and by the time they had taken coffee they were on their former footing.

"There is a great draught," said Mrs. Dallas when they went upstairs.

"The landing window is open," returned Myra, going to close it.

The staircase and landings up to the second story occupied an annex in the Melford Road semi-detached houses, so the window in question opened on the balcony running along the front of the house, on which also the drawing room windows gave.

"Thank you, dear," said Mrs. Dallas when Myra joined her. "Pray see if these windows are fastened, for I feel so chilly."

Myra drew aside the curtains which hung straight across from side to side of the bay windows, and found one of the door-like French casements unlatched.

"How careless of Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas. "She has been very careless of late; indeed, I have quite changed my opinion of her. I hope you do not leave your things about, Myra, for she might be tempted to take them—that ring, for instance?"

"It is quite safe, Mrs. Dallas."

"I hope so, my love. It is not wise nor kind to try the virtue of our inferiors too severely."

Lionel, who could play his own accompaniments when he chose, now went to the piano and sang one or two ballads sweetly enough; then he came to the fireplace and asked if his mother cared for a game of chess.

"Thank you, no. I do not feel quite equal to so serious an amusement," she answered. "By the way, I have a very kind and pressing invitation from Lady Shirland to dine with her on the twenty-sixth—to-morrow week: an invitation for us all. What do you say, Myra?"

"What do you say, aunt?"

"I think," said Mrs. Dallas, "that I cannot keep you shut up much longer. We have refused so many kind invitations from Lady Shirland that I must say 'yes' this time."

"I think you ought, mother."

"And you, Myra?"

"Oh, I shall be very pleased to go if you wish it."

"Very well, I shall write an acceptance. It will be no party, of course; only morning dress, or I could not go. I do not think you have ever been to anything approaching a dinner party before, Myra?"

"No, Aunt Dallas, never."

"I dare say it will not be your last," said Mrs. Dallas, as she went to the writing table to write her note.

The following evening Leyton, who was sitting alone in his not very luxurious lodgings, and deep in a book on the "Renaissance in Italy," was recalled to everyday life by a note from Lady Shirland:

DEAR JACK, the 26th at 7.45. I have caught our shy birds—the whole covey—so be sure to come. It is the first day I am free; please send the inclosed to your chum, Mr. Ardill. I don't want too many of our own set, and Wardlaw is engaged.

Leyton was free, and pleased to go. In fact, it roused

the keenest curiosity and expectation in his breast. To meet Myra at a dinner party was a wonderful event in itself. She seemed so entirely out of range of dinner parties, tea parties, balls, regulation parties of all kinds, that to encounter her in an ordinary social gathering was like transplanting Gretchen or Thekla from the pages of Goethe or Schiller into the supreme commonplace of London life.

"How will she look? how will she behave?" he asked himself, "ignorant as she is of the shibboleth of the every day world. Will the touchstone of society turn her simple grace to clumsiness, her sweet candor, her self-forgetfulness into tactless stupidity? I think not, yet who can tell? Then I shall see her with her captors—if they *are* her captors—and be able to judge how they stand to each other. I must go and see Mrs. Keene; she was going to call on Myra. I wonder if I am making an ass of myself by spinning a web of imaginary double-dealing and profound villainy, chiefly at the instigation of a kindly, credulous, wonder-loving, elderly soul like Mrs. Keene. Gad! I'll go and look her up."

Then, as it is apt to do in these mental exercises, the pendulum of thought having swung far enough to one side, took the opposite direction and went the same distance on the other. After all, why should he form so bad an opinion of Mrs. Dallas without a shadow of reason? She was probably a warm-blooded woman, who would be strong in liking or disliking; her harshness and kindness to Myra might be thus explained; while she believed her a mischief-maker, no harshness would have seemed too harsh. When she discovered her mistake, no kindness would be sufficient, even to consenting to her marriage with her adored son. And after all, if the young man loved Myra well and pleased her, her life might be happy with him—better than poverty and uncertainty—only Leyton wished he had nothing but English blood in his veins and was a gentleman. Poor little Myra! not that she was small; no, she was above the average height of women—but there was something so helpless in her uncomplaining resignation, something so touching in the circumstances of her innocent youth, that all the generous chivalry of Leyton's nature yearned to watch over her and give light and warmth to her existence. Perhaps, had she been a plain, lumpy young person, his inter-

est would have been less warm, less keen. Alas! for the innate injustice of human beings: but so it is.

Of course, Leyton was only actuated by pity, but—Myra was such a womanly creature, that whatever feeling she excited must be streaked with tenderness, especially in hearts like his. “At any rate,” was his concluding thought, as he turned back to his book, “she has done more to make me forget my own disgust of life, and to make me a live man once more, than anyone or anything. Poor old Dallas! If he could but see what an isolated waif his darling is now, I don’t think the angels above or the devils below would keep him back from revisiting this world again. But he ought to have made some provision for her—that’s the rub—the bar sinister *and* an empty pocket are too heavy odds for the strongest man; and for a tender, delicate girl. It’s too bad to think about.”

The time which intervened between the receipt of her invitation and Lady Shirland’s dinner seemed long indeed to Leyton. He did not carry out his intention of calling on Mrs. Keene; he thought better of it. If she had seen Myra, and had anything to communicate, she would have done so. If she had nothing to tell, he had better not waste his time listening to her fears and absurd objections which, somehow, found an echo in his own unreasoning fancies, and worried him more than he would have liked to confess.

The expected day, however, came at last.

Leyton’s impatience brought him in good time to Lady Shirland’s abode. He was the first to arrive and was cordially welcomed, and immediately engaged in a discussion respecting an exhibition of his sketches, by Miss Browne, a project in which she interested herself immensely. She had asked Mr. Bartlett, the great art critic, to meet him; it was *so* useful to meet these people, and cultivate them, especially at a small dinner. They were rather fortunate in securing him, he was *so* run after, etc., etc.

Mrs. Dallas and suite were just in time and no more.

While waiting for Lionel, who was a little late, Mrs. Dallas said rather suddenly, “Myra, my dear, I want you to be as kind and sisterly to Lionel as you can this evening. He was not very well last night, and is depressed to-day. I want him to enjoy the evening. He has an uncommon nature, and needs kindness to keep him straight. You will

help me with him, will you not?" She opened and shut her fan as she spoke; evidently she was anxious.

"Certainly, aunt! I will be as nice as I can; but is it not funny that I should have to comfort and sustain a young man of the world, and at my first dinner party, too?"

"Under his circumstances, I think it is *not* remarkable, Myra," returned Mrs. Dallas with a frown. She resented any sally of this description from her niece; any thought or action uninspired by herself was open rebellion in her eyes. But Lionel appeared, and they started without further words.

Leyton watched the party enter with deep interest. First came Mrs. Dallas, stately and handsome in her widow's weeds; then Myra, her simple black dress made a little more suitable to the occasion by being opened in the front, and filled in with foamy white crape lisse frills. She showed no shyness, no timidity; she was as softly composed as when she visited his studio; she looked graceful and refined. Her eyes sought him at once, and gave him a slowly mantling blush of welcome; the color remained and gave wonderful depth to the blue of her eyes. Young Ashby, however, was the member of the party to whom Leyton gave most attention. He was agreeably surprised by his look and air. Except that he was dark as a Spaniard, and his mustaches were thin and fine, there was little indication of his mixed blood. He was slight, but well made; quiet and graceful in manner, had an engaging smile, and dazzling white teeth. "A deuced good-looking fellow!" thought Leyton.

Nothing could be more gently gracious than the greeting accorded by Mrs. Dallas to Myra's friend, and Myra herself giving him her hand, said, with a sigh and a straight, half-reproachful look, "It's so long since I saw you!"

"That is because you are never at home!" returned Leyton quickly.

Myra made no reply, and cast down her eyes, for Mrs. Dallas was standing close beside her; then dinner was announced. Leyton was given to Mrs. Dallas, and Myra to his chum, Ardill. These four were at opposite sides of the table, and occasionally exchanged a word across it. Leyton was, therefore, able to observe the manners and bearing

of the novice whose fortunes occupied so much of his thoughts.

There was, indeed, little of the novice about her. Her quiet simplicity, her evident freedom from any preoccupation about self, had all the effect of high-bred composure. Nor did she seem to be at any loss for conversation. Whatever the topic Ardill seemed to have hit on, it was something that interested her; for she listened and looked and smiled in a way that evidently rewarded her cavalier for his efforts to amuse.

Miss Browne quite absorbed Lionel Ashby, and Lady Shirland had plenty to say to the art critic, who was to be fed and flattered, soothed and stimulated.

Mrs. Dallas selected Myra for her subject, and did not find it difficult to keep Leyton's attention fixed.

"I am very glad to have an opportunity of talking with you, my dear Mr. Leyton," she began. "You have been so good to poor Myra. She has told me all about the sketching lessons you gave her, and your kindly calling upon her. She has had a miserably dull life, but I hope things look better for her. We are planning a little tour in France and Germany."

"Indeed! That will be a great joy for Myra, and rouse her up; though I must say she looks pounds better than when I saw her last."

"You think so? I am so glad!" said Mrs. Dallas with soft satisfaction. "You really must come to tea with us, and help me in making our plans. I know nothing of the Continent, except for a visit or two to Paris, coming to and fro from Marseilles; and my son, who knows France better, cannot accompany us. Later in the season he may join us; but business will keep him for the present in London."

"I shall be most happy to be of the slightest use; but I have not been on the Continent for some years. When shall I have the pleasure of calling?"

"Oh! Let me see. Next Sunday. Gentlemen are generally free on Sundays."

"Thank you. I shall be delighted."

"I am told, Mr. Leyton, you are going to exhibit your works. I hope you will have a great success. When will the exhibition be open, and where will it be?"

"Oh, at one of the small galleries in Pall Mall. I will give you due notice."

"I only hope we may be in town. We think of starting in about a fortnight or three weeks."

"A very pleasant time. Places are not so crowded as in the autumn," etc., etc., etc.

And talk flowed on in the ordinary channels of commonplace, till the ladies rose.

Leyton held the door open for them to pass out.

"Don't be too long," said Dorothea playfully, in a loud whisper; and then ran upstairs after Myra.

"That Dallas woman isn't half bad," thought Leyton, returning to his place. "She speaks fair enough. There's a look in the corner of her eye at times I don't quite like; but I am infernally prejudiced. Why should she not like a sweet young creature like Myra? It would be natural enough if—that is to say, she has given up being charming and attractive herself; but I am not so sure about that."

Then he addressed himself to Lionel Ashby, and tried to draw him out—not very successfully, for the young man seemed to retreat behind a rampart of reserve; so Leyton joined the battle which was raging between the critic and Ardill on some side issues of art, and which detained them longer than Miss Brown liked.

Meantime Lionel stole away; and when Leyton reached the drawing room, he was leaning over a sofa where Dorothea and Myra were sitting together. The latter was looking up to him with a frank, kind expression, which seemed to Leyton as indicative of sympathy and mutual understanding, at sight of which he was conscious of an unreasoning and unpleasant rising of the gorge.

He was making his way to add a fourth to the trio, when Mrs. Dallas stopped him, with some unimportant question about studios in Paris, and which would he recommend, should Myra wish to study there. "For," added Mrs. Dallas, "if she is really anxious to be an artist, I should not oppose her; but I fear she is not strong enough for real hard work."

"Work strengthens if it is not overdone. I will send you or bring you the names of some. Indeed, I think of running over to Paris when I have started my 'show,' and might advise better on the spot,"

While he spoke, Miss Brown and Myra rose and went to the piano. Lionel put up some music, while Myra seated herself and began an accompaniment. A duet ensued between Dorothea and Lionel, then a solo by the lady, during which Leyton stood a little behind them, fretting at the loss of precious time. The evening was slipping away, and he dreaded losing the rare chance of speaking to Myra.

At the end of the song Miss Browne exclaimed:

"Go on playing, dear—just anything. The sound of the piano makes the duller talk."

At the same time Lady Shirland called "Mr. Ashby!" in her pleasant, authoritative voice; so Lionel went. Miss Browne turned with a smile to Leyton; but, disregarding it, he went to the piano, and leaning on the side of it, where he could see the young musician's face, said:

"I thought I was never to see you again, Myra. Mrs. Keene said you were not well. I find you are looking blooming."

"I am quite well. I was only tired of having nothing to do when Mrs. Keene came. The idea of traveling is so delightful; then perhaps my aunt may stay in Paris and let me study painting."

"She has just been speaking to me of it."

"Has she?" with eagerness. "Then she really means it?"

The phrase was eloquent of distrust to Leyton's ear. He looked intently into her eyes; so eagerly that Myra smiled.

"Are you happy?" asked Leyton, bending a little nearer, and almost in a whisper.

"I am—now," she returned deliberately, her eyes sinking slowly on the notes.

There was an emphasis on "now" which did not escape his ear.

"I trust you will be happy always. I think of going to Paris for a little while. We may meet."

"I do hope——"

Here Miss Browne interposed.

"You know," she said, in a familiar, caressing way, "you promised to advise me about the curtains for my boudoir;" and in spite of himself Leyton was carried off. When he returned Mrs. Dallas was standing as if in the

it of leave taking, while Myra and Lionel Ashby were talking in a very friendly and intimate manner.

"I have stayed far later than I intended," Mrs. Dallas was saying. "But I have done well in coming. The delightful atmosphere of your pleasant house seems to have broken the spell which has hung over me. I hope to be quite myself when we return."

"Doesn't that crusty old critic give you the idea of an English 'Pooh-Bah'?" said Lionel to Myra.

"Yes, quite." She smiled, and turned her eyes appreciatively to his. Whatever he said, it brought the quick color to her cheeks and made the lids droop over her eyes, while she slightly shrank away.

The next moment they were saying good-night. As she passed through the door, Myra turned and gave a last look at Leyton—a look that dwelt long with him. Up to that moment he had almost believed that all was well with her, but in that look there was a sudden revelation of fear, dependency, and farewell.

"It's not all right," was his prompt comment. "It will be so hard, but I shall manage a talk with her on Sunday."

CHAPTER XV.

MYSTERIOUS PROCEEDINGS.

BUT Leyton never had the chance.

The day after Lady Shirland's dinner Mrs. Dallas developed a bad chill. She shivered, she burned, her head swam, her back ached, she was faint, she had palpitation of the heart; she sent for the doctor, and the doctor sent her to bed.

She really had a cold, but she may possibly have improved the symptoms. Myra was the most attentive nurse possible. Myra was a born nurse; she was so sympathetic that she divined the sufferer's wants.

Lionel, too, was profoundly anxious about his mother; so much so that he constantly got away from his business at extraordinary early hours, and passed the greater part of his day in the house. Consequently, Myra spent most of hers in the sick room.

Mrs. Dallas was very silent, but also very restless. Myra did not like to question her, but she wondered to herself if Jack Leyton would call on Sunday, and if she should have to see him in the drawing room alone.

Sunday passed, however, and he never came. On Monday, late in the day he did, and asked for Miss Dallas; but on descending to the dining room, she found him standing on the hearthrug and conversing with Lionel, so their short conversation was confined to the merest commonplaces.

He called again and again, only to meet Lionel. So nearly three weeks passed, and Mrs. Dallas was convalescent.

The third or fourth evening after she had come downstairs, and was lying back in an easy chair, wrapped in one of her beautiful Indian shawls, she complained of cold, and begged Myra to put on more coal.

The scuttle was empty, and Myra, with her usual readiness to save trouble, ran to the top of the kitchen stairs

and asked for a fresh supply. In a few minutes Mrs. Dwyer herself appeared with a shovelful.

"Very sorry you've had to call, 'm. I've just sent Jane to the greengrocer's; she shall fill the scuttle as soon as she comes in. This will just keep the fire going."

She made it up, swept the hearth, and taking the scuttle to depart, stopped to inquire how Mrs. Dallas felt herself. That lady scarcely replied. Myra was sitting at the opposite side of the work table, with her back to the windows, waiting to resume the reading aloud which Mrs. Dwyer's entrance had interrupted. As that worthy woman passed close by Myra on her way to the door, she exclaimed, "Dear, dear, that girl is terrible careless! She can't half sweep the room this morning, for here's a big piece of flue." She paused to pick up something and throw it in the scuttle as she spoke, and then proceeded on her way, leaving, half under the hem of Myra's skirt, a note.

Myra, warned by a glance, perceived the maneuver. With a beating heart, and an odd sense of guilt and shame, she remained quite still, her cheeks glowing.

She must not betray Mrs. Dwyer, at any rate; but for herself she had nothing to conceal. If Mrs. Dallas ever discovered any underhand dealing on her part, why the world would come to an end. It would be too shameful to deceive her aunt, unless, indeed, she backed up Lionel too strongly; and Lionel had been making her feel rather uneasy of late. Yes, she must take that note and read it. Heavens! how thankful she was that her aunt's eyes were closed.

It seemed suddenly revealed to her, that under her sincere gratitude, her admiration, her doubts, lay a deeply rooted, though unaccountable fear of Mrs. Dallas.

"Are you not going to read?" asked that lady languidly. "You might put me off to sleep; and I had a wretched night."

"Oh, yes! I will," said Myra quickly, and reaching down her hand, as if to draw her skirt closer about her, she secured the note and slipped it into her pocket.

Then she began to read, but her voice was unsteady for the first few sentences; then, as Mrs. Dallas lay quite still, she gradually recovered herself, and, as the moments flew by, eager curiosity replaced her fears. The time seemed

long, indeed, till soon after dinner. When her aunt retired, at last, having carefully attended to all her patient's wants, Myra escaped to her own room, and locking the door, opened her letter.

It was addressed to her. Glancing at the signature, she saw the name, "J. Leyton," and, with a sudden sense of delight, she read:

DEAR MYRA:

I hope you will get this; I have written twice before in vain, so pray answer! I hope you are not quite worn out by your attendance on your aunt. Is all well with you? I write chiefly to tell you that I start on Tuesday for Paris, and after for Brussels. My address at the former place will be 23 Rue du Marché, St. Honoré; at Brussels, *poste restante*. Don't fail to write if you want me. I shall be away a month. Let me know your whereabouts, for I should like to be your cicerone in the queen of cities. When shall you start? Ever your friend.

J. LEYTON.

He was going in three days—only three days—and he would be out of reach. She had no certain information of any kind to give him. She must write, just to thank him; but she had no stamp, no envelope, not a penny to buy one. She would—yes, she would dare to steal an envelope from her aunt's well-filled stationery case; and she had a sheet of note-paper and a pencil in her room. Mrs. Dwyer would post it for her, if she could reach her unperceived. How keenly she felt that she was watched at every turn; it was borne in upon her. She was tired of saying she wanted to go and see Mrs. Fairchild, the visit was always put off. She seemed to be hedged in with invisible fencing, she could not take a single step alone. The present moment, at least, was hers; she, therefore, took her only sheet of paper, and wrote as clearly as she could with an indifferent pencil:

How good of you to write! I have had only one note from you. I am well, but always a little tired. My aunt is better; I do not know when she intends to start. She is kind, but—I wish I could work for myself. I have no stamp; pray forgive an unstamped letter. Do *not* write again, unless you hear from me. Always your attached old "friend."

MYRA.

She wanted to say much more, but she feared to attempt it, time might fail her. She wished to be prepared for Mrs.

Dwyer, who would, she felt sure, make some attempt to communicate with her. She wrote Leyton's address at the end of her note and then tore up his into the smallest fragments, and put them with her note under her pillow.

It was long before she went to sleep. Her brain was working too actively. A hundred tiny voices seemed to tell her in whispers which were more distinct than the loudest trumpet call, that her present life could not go on, or she would become an idiot. The perpetual sense of being surrounded by something vague, impalpable yet constraining, kept her in a constant condition of apprehension and uneasiness. Yet there was nothing of which she had a right to complain.

Then she dreaded Lionel in a stupid, unreasonable way. In spite of his self-restraint and precaution, she felt that he had not relinquished his determination to marry her, and she felt also convinced that Mrs. Dallas would do her utmost to gratify her idolized son, and this frightened her still more.

"I am weak and foolish," she said to herself. "Why should they hurt me? If Lionel troubles me more I shall try to get away. I shall earn my bread somehow. I shall go with my aunt abroad. It may be rather pleasant without Lionel; but when I return I *will* arrange my life my own way. Jack will help me, even though he *is* married to Miss Browne."

Comforted by this resolution Myra at length fell asleep. She seemed to herself to be awakened almost immediately by hearing her blind drawn up. She opened her eyes, and beheld Mrs. Dwyer herself covering her hot-water can with the folded towel.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Dwyer softly, seeing her eyes were open. "I came myself, for I thought maybe you'd have an answer to that letter."

"Thank you—oh, thank you!" whispered Myra, as the suspicious landlady crept over to her noiselessly. "I have no envelope; but here is the note, and the address is here."

"Will you trust it to me, miss, to put in an envelope and direct?"

"Yes—gladly," raising herself and drawing the note from under her pillow. "And these pieces—take them too."

"Lord's sake, miss, let me see that there are no more lying about!" and Mrs. Dwyer rummaged under the bolster and

peeped beneath the bed. "It's all right," she whispered. "I'll post it myself."

"I have no stamp," murmured Myra.

"Never mind. Let him see you haven't," returned Mrs. Dwyer, scanning the address. "I must go. I'll call Mrs. Dallas too, because the 'gurl' has been obliged to fetch fresh butter;" and with a solemn nod she disappeared.

Myra rose, a curious mixture of feelings contending in her heart—joy that her note was safely despatched; irritation and self-contempt at being driven to such underhand proceedings.

This uncomfortable sense of frayed self-esteem pursued her at breakfast and spoiled her repast.

"You don't eat, Myra," said Mrs. Dallas, "and you look as if you had not slept. Are you not well, my dear?"

"Yes, thank you—quite well. I had bad dreams—that is all."

"Bad dreams are very bad," put in Lionel. "I think the sooner you get off, mother, the better. Both Myra and yourself evidently want change."

"You are right, Lionel. I do not see why we should not get off by the end of next week. I should like a month at Cannes to begin with; then the spring will be advanced, and we might travel a little in Germany."

There was some talk about Cook's tickets and other details of the journeying, which cheered Myra greatly. Movement of any kind was a kind of emancipation.

From this time Mrs. Dallas began to make her preparations. She was physically quite herself, but more silent and thoughtful than usual—thoughtful in a somber manner—sitting long with knitted brows, as if brooding over unpleasant memories or anticipations.

Matters progressed in the usual way. There was much shopping and laying-in of various things, which they could get just as well, if a little dearer, in the towns they visited. Myra proved herself of use in many ways, and the days went merrily.

If they might only pause for a few days at Paris. But she dared not suggest it.

Lady Shirland, though deeply immersed in the social whirl of the season, invited Mrs. Dallas and her niece to luncheon, whereat Myra heard more of her aunt's plans

than she had yet known. Miss Browne was both sympathetic and enthusiastic.

"How I envy you this first experience of continental travel!" she said to Myra. "Of course, you lived in Germany in your childhood; but that did not mean traveling. And I am sure you will have delightful *compagnons de voyage* in Mrs. Dallas and Mr. Ashby."

"My son will not join us for some time. Then he will pick us up at Dijon; and we will go into Switzerland together. He will be very useful. He was at school in France in his early boyhood, and speaks French very well."

"Then you will go on to Geneva? How charming! Shall you make any stay in Paris?"

"I do not think so—perhaps returning. But I think of remaining abroad for four or five months, Lady Shirland," said Mrs. Dallas.

"Oh, indeed! Well, let me know when you make a halt anywhere, and I shall give you introductions. We know a good many people here and there on the Continent."

"Mr. Leyton is in Paris now. I should think he would be a charming *cicerone*," said Dorothea.

"No doubt; but we shall only pass through at present."

"Well, do keep us *au courant*," added Lady Shirland. "Send me a line now and then."

"And will you write to *me*?" said Dorothea affectionately to Myra.

Then there was a very affectionate leave-taking, and cordial wishes for *un bon voyage*.

The day but one after, Mrs. Dallas went into town early after luncheon to settle some business, leaving Myra to do various matters—to select books from the bookcase in the drawing room; to fold and put away their winter dresses, and make a list of sundries to be left behind.

She was busy over the books when Lionel came in, and taking his place before the fire, which Mrs. Dallas could not dispense with, observed:

"Very busy, Myra?"

"Yes; there is really a great deal to do before we can move. Are you not free very early nowadays?" looking at the clock.

"You see, I am so valuable at the office that they favor me a little," he returned.

"I should imagine that if you are valuable you could be ill spared."

"You are growing quite sharp, Myra."

Myra did not answer, but continued kneeling before the dwarf bookcase, and taking out a book here and there.

"I shall be very miserable, Myra, when you and my mother are gone," said Lionel.

"Yes; I am afraid you will," returned Myra kindly. She rose from her lowly position, and stood trying to wipe off the dust from her fingers with the duster she held. "But you must go and see Miss Browne often. She sent you some very kind messages, which I forget. They are going to have a number of parties, and——"

"Do you think any Miss Browne, any parties, would make up to me for *you*? You can't picture to yourself how I shall feel when you are gone—even for a short time."

"Lionel, you promised not to talk in this strain any more."

"I do not care what I promised. I cannot be silent. Have you still the same dislike to me, Myra?"

"I do not dislike you. I should like you well enough if you were really my brother."

"I should cut my throat if I were. Myra, before you leave me I want you to understand that nothing you can say or do will turn me from my determination to marry you; and, mind, my mother will help me."

"But, Lionel, how can you wish to marry a girl that does not love you—I mean in that way?"

"I don't care whether you do or not. I *want* you. If you were my own I would teach you to love me. I would——"

He stopped abruptly.

"Oh, Lionel, can love be taught?"

"How do you know? What put that question into your head?" he cried almost fiercely.

"I do not know. Nature, perhaps."

"If I were your husband you would learn to love me."

"If you were my husband," said Myra, something of resolution and repulsion bursting into sudden glowing life within her, "I should hate you! Do not dream of what is impossible."

"And you—— Be warned—do not defy me! What

are you—what have you—that you reject *all* I can offer?”

“I am myself,” said Myra quietly, “and I shall do what I think best. Do not force me to speak to you unkindly. I would rather not.”

She spoke with firm calmness, looking straight into his burning eyes. He stood still, as if arrested by her manner; and, turning from him, she left the room, saying:

“I have a good deal to do for my aunt.”

They did not meet again till dinner-time the following day; but Myra felt sure Lionel had repeated their conversation to his mother. She was very still and cold—it seemed an effort to her to attend to her preparations—and the slight exhilaration which the prospect of their journey had given to Myra quickly evaporated before a chill, undefined sense of danger.

They were now within four days of that fixed for their start. It was soon after breakfast; Myra was busy in the dining room wrapping up some ornaments to be left behind, when Mrs. Dwyer came in with a parcel and a bill.

“Where is Mrs. Dallas, miss?”

“In her room, I think.”

Mrs. Dwyer advanced nearer, having set the door wide open, and standing where she could see the stairs, said in a low tone:

“So you are going, miss. Ah! I *am* sorry.”

“Why?” said Myra, startled.

“I do not know. Only it comes over me that you would be better here.”

“Oh, Mrs. Dwyer,” whispered Myra with an impulse of confidence, “I am quite miserable. When I came in here this morning to breakfast Mrs. Dallas was alone with Mr. Ashby; and I heard her say, in such a cruel voice, ‘She shall have no choice!’ What *could* she mean? Did she mean me?”

“I dare say. She is a devil; so is the son. He has been put out of the office—*that* is why he comes home so early. I wish you weren’t going with him.”

“He is not coming with us.”

“Don’t you be too sure,” with an upward toss of the chin, expressive of the most utter disbelief.

“He may join us later, but——”

"Just so," interrupted Mrs. Dwyer hastily. "I'll try and find out what they are after. I've caught a word or two, and I must hear more. I always suspected——" Here she suddenly raised her voice, and, in a totally different key, added, "I'll go on to her room, miss; for the boy is waiting for his money."

"What do you want, Mrs. Dwyer?" asked Mrs. Dallas, coming in.

"A parcel from Jay's, 'm. One pound thirteen and six to pay."

"Myra, my dear, will you bring me my purse? I left it on my dressing table."

Myra obeyed; and Mrs. Dallas continued to speak with Mrs. Dwyer about her arrangements.

"Were those ladies who called yesterday afternoon looking at the rooms upstairs?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Did you come to terms?"

"No, 'm; they thought the rent too high."

"It is foolish to hold out for too high a rent, Mrs. Dwyer. A few weeks 'unlet' would be a greater loss than a comparatively small price."

"Maybe so, 'm. But I am thinking I should like a rest; and I might wait till Mr. Ashby goes, and let all the rooms except the one you keep. When will he leave, 'm?"

"Well, I have taken these rooms for a month. He may leave a little before, but he'll certainly not stay longer."

As she spoke Mrs. Dallas slowly raised her eyes and fastened them on her interlocutor's with "a sort of a searchingness," Mrs. Dwyer afterward described, "that might make a stouter woman than me shake in her shoes." Here Myra returned with the purse, and Mrs. Dallas counted out the money.

"There," she said, "be sure you make the messenger receipt the bill; and remember, Mrs. Dwyer, I do not re-enter on my tenancy of these rooms till the fifteenth of August."

"Very well, 'm;" and Mrs. Dwyer disappeared.

"Till August!" exclaimed Myra. "That will be a nice long time; we can see many places in that time." She felt somehow comforted by the idea, for Mrs. Dallas would never let Lionel rest in idleness all those months. Even if it

were true that he had lost his employment, he must seek another.

"You would like to live abroad, then, Myra?"

"I do not care much where I live, but you know I never had any *home* in England."

"Do you not feel at home with *me*, Myra?" asked Mrs. Dallas, with a somewhat constrained smile.

"I should do so, aunt," returned Myra, coloring, but speaking steadily, "if I could earn even a little for myself, so as not to be obliged to ask you for money. When you do so much for me——"

"And how do you propose to earn money, Myra?"

"I could give German lessons, and——"

"Put it out of your head for the present. When we return—but no one knows what may happen in three or four months, nor do I care much. It is my lot to be disappointed. Go, my dear; put on your hat. I want to do a little shopping—the last before we go, I hope, for money is just running away like water."

Myra went away to her room struck with some self-reproach by her aunt's tone; it was bitter and hard. "I am mistaken, and she really likes me. I must seem very unkind," she thought. "I wish, I do wish I had not told Mrs. Dwyer I had heard her say, 'She shall have *no* choice.' I did not seem able to keep back the words. However, we shall soon be free of Lionel, at least for a whole month; that will be *something*."

It seemed a confirmation of Mrs. Dwyer's news that, the whole of the next morning, Lionel was in and out doing various errands for his mother. He did not, however, dine with them, and as Mrs. Dallas seemed much occupied with her writing, Myra went away early to her own room.

Saturday—the day fixed for their departure—was now close at hand, and Myra began to count the hours which intervened. She thought that Mrs. Dallas kept her rather closely at her side, but she told herself that this must be a morbid fancy which would vanish once she was across the Channel, away from London and its trammels.

Lionel had been cold and distant since his last rebuff. Once or twice she caught a glance from his dark eyes expressive both of hatred and admiration, which raised a quick

sense of dread in her heart. "I am growing a hopeless coward," she thought.

On Wednesday afternoon, returning with Mrs. Dallas, who had been going round to pay her tradespeople finally, the door did not open to the application of the latch key.

"Some more of their stupid cleaning," said Mrs. Dallas, as she rang the bell impatiently. She was not kept waiting, for Mrs. Dwyer opened to them almost immediately.

"I'm sure I don't know how it happened," said the landlady apologetically.

Mrs. Dallas swept past her without a word. Then, to Myra's amazement, Mrs. Dwyer, with a warning glance, thrust a small folded piece of paper into her hand, which closed mechanically upon it.

"Come here, Myra," called Mrs. Dallas as she entered the dining room. It was only to give her a small parcel to carry upstairs. Myra complied willingly, and then went on to her own room, where she ventured to read the scrap of paper given her by Mrs. Dwyer. It opened up much larger than she expected, and was scrawled over in a large hand:

I have something to tell you. Don't lock your door to-night; don't be frightened if I come in; try to keep awake. Destroy this.

An injunction immediately obeyed by tearing it into infinitesimal morsels and throwing them from the window.

What could Mrs. Dwyer have to say—what could she have found out? Might she not be actuated by her evident dislike to Mrs. Dallas and her son; Myra's heart beat violently; she trembled from head to foot. She tried for some minutes in vain to compose herself. She was so awfully alone in the wide, terrible world, without one friend on earth but dear, kind Mrs. Keene, and what was she to be pitted against the cruel determination of Mrs. Dallas. Why—why did her uncle's widow keep such a firm grip of her poor, insignificant self?

"I will *not* lose my head with foolish fright," said Myra to herself. "I *will* try and keep cool and quiet, or they will suspect something, and I must—oh, I must—hear what Mrs. Dwyer has to say!"

She removed her hat, and going to the glass, was shocked at the reflection of her pale cheeks and terrified eyes. She

took a rough towel and rubbed her face to create a little color. Then she arranged her hair and dress, and pausing to recover the wild beating of her heart, found herself better able to face Mrs. Dallas.

Never did the terrible recollection of that evening fade from her. Fortunately it was near dinner time, and Mrs. Dallas was occupied with her favorite literature—the newspaper, so Myra was free to sit silent with her knitting, while her thoughts flew far and wide; first there was the intense curiosity to know what Mrs. Dwyer could possibly have to tell; then the vague but poignant dread of evil—of she knew not what; then tormenting doubts of her own sound judgment in listening to the suggestions, either of her own fears, or of Mrs. Dwyer's prejudices. Suppose she refused to go away with Mrs. Dallas; what was she to do? People would think her mad, except, perhaps, Mrs. Keene, and she could not be a burden on *her*. Finally, she had not a penny in the world. What was to become of her? she could form no idea until the promised conference with Mrs. Dwyer.

Meantime Lionel came in; dinner was served and eaten in nearly complete silence. In the evening Mrs. Dallas made some attempts at conversation, which Myra, almost to her own surprise, seconded nobly. Toward the end all grew more lively and talkative over Bradshaw, and the maps, and at last—at last, Myra felt she might say “Good-night.”

“Good-night,” returned Mrs. Dallas, “only two more nights before we leave England for the continental paradise of which you dream, Myra.”

“That is saying too much, aunt,” she returned. “Good-night, Lionel.” He rose and opened the door for her. “Good-night, to *you*,” he said as she passed, “though you have murdered sleep for me.”

It was better when she was alone—at least, she had no need to guard her face—she could relieve her restlessness by walking softly to and fro. She locked her door as usual and put out her candle. It was a fine moonlight night, and she sat still and silent before undressing, till she heard her aunt come up and go into her room; then the landing gas was put out, the glimmer through her keyhole vanished; then she partly undressed, unlocked her door, and lay down.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BOLD STROKE.

THE moments dropped slowly into the abyss of past time as if double-leaded, while Myra lay awake and watching. A distant clock chimed one, and still she listened with quick-beating pulses to the profound stillness.

At last, though there was no sound, she saw, in the dim moonlight which made things visible, her door open, and a figure she scarcely recognized enter. But it *was* Mrs. Dwyer, in a long gray and black wrapper and a black shawl, all her iron-gray hair being scraped up into a knot on the top of her head, making her long, bony face look many times older, sterner, and more weird. Without a word she closed the door and turned the key. Then coming close to the bed, she whispered, "I oiled them well, both hinge and lock, yesterday. Now listen, we are safe for a bit. After you went up to bed last night—that is, Tuesday night, I let my young gentleman in, and bad he looked. He says, 'Where's my mother?'"

"'In the drawing room,' says I; and up he went, stopping when he had got a few steps to ask for some seltzer water. So I took it up myself.

"They were talking hard by the time I got to the drawing room, and looking as black as thunder. I set down the tray, with the glasses and seltzer *and* the brandy. Mrs. Dallas never said, 'Thank you;' she always treats you like dirt! I just mentioned the girl was out; all she said was, 'Draw the curtains'—so I did; but I saw that one of the windows was a wee bit open. It was a still night, and I just left it as it was; then I came out, and sees that the landing window was ajar, too; and some angel put it into my head to go round by the balcony to the room again and listen. I propped the landing window open, and just slipped back behind the curtains. *She* was speaking. 'We must settle everything now,' she says, very determined, 'for

I'll never commit myself on paper about such a plan; but, if you obey me, it can't fail.' Then she went on, hard and clear. He is to meet you at Lyons not later than the 10th (that's only three weeks off) and you are to travel to another place; and there something is to go wrong—she is to go on one way, and you are to be left alone with the son to go another. Then she says you'll be glad enough to marry him because of scandal, or some such thing; and she is to seem ignorant, and say you had eloped with her son unknown to her. At the end she says very bitter and cruel, 'I can't bear any more of her insolent nonsense. We have lost too much precious time. All must be done before November term begins.' With that, young Ashby got up saying pretty loud, 'It's an admirably devilish plot!' and began to pace the room, and his mother said, 'Hush!' So I slipped out, and fastened up the landing window pretty carefully. Now, Miss Dallas, whatever you do, don't go away out of the country with them."

This extraordinary revelation was uttered rapidly, in a low, impressive whisper, suggestive of murder and conspiracy.

"You really heard all this?" murmured Myra, even more bewildered than frightened. "My own aunt would betray me! It is almost incredible."

"It's as true as that the moon is shining up there; and she is in terrible earnest. What's the reason she wants you so bad for her son?"

"I *cannot* tell, Mrs. Dwyer."

"Don't go with her, any way. She has a soft tongue. She might make you out a lunatic, or God knows what, when she had you away from the country."

"What can I do? Where can I go?" whispered Myra, grasping Mrs. Dwyer's hand in both her own and drawing her closer. "My head turns; I do not seem able to think." She stopped a moment, and then began again more calmly. "But I *will* escape! What you tell me seems true—it seems to realize all the vague doubts and forebodings I have had—and I dread Lionel so much. What shall I do?"

"You might go to Mrs. Keene for a bit, and get advice from that gentleman, Mr. Leyton, as called here so often. Haven't you no relations but Mrs. Dallas?"

"I never knew any but Uncle Edward," returned Myra, still clinging to her hand and speaking in a frightened whisper. "Mrs. Dallas is no relation."

"Then, I suppose, she could not force you to come back. Could you ask that grand Lady—Lady Shirland—to help you?"

"She would never believe anything against Mrs. Dallas. No; I will go to Mrs. Keene, and, when he comes back, Mr. Leyton will advise me. Oh, I cannot bear to trouble him!"

"But you can't afford to stand on ceremony, miss. You get away at all costs. You can't keep hidden long; but you'll have time to look about you. Will you risk it?"

"I will," said Myra, letting Mrs. Dwyer's hand go, and slipping out of bed to sit on the side of it when she had brought her only chair for her "nocturnal visitor." "But, you know, I have not one penny."

"I guessed that, miss. I'll lend you a few shillings, and Mrs. Keene can dispose of the ring. You have kept it out of sight, I hope?"

"Yes; I have it quite safe."

"How will you get away is the thing," resumed Mrs. Dwyer. "You must just watch your chance. She will be going out, for sure. You must just fly the minute her back is turned; and mind you make for Salisbury Avenue—it is the wide road at the end on the left, and turn left—the 'buses to the Addison Road Station cross it; or you might find a cab—it's only a shilling fare. Don't any way, go by Earl's Court—you might run into her arms. Then you can get on to the Portland Station, quite near Mrs. Keene's place. Now, can you understand all this?"

"Yes; and I will do it. If I have not courage now, I shall be a slave for life. Since you have taken all this trouble for me, you shall see I am not unworthy of it."

"And you will never let out that I listened and warned you?"

"Never, Mrs. Dwyer—never!"

"Well, now we'd better finish the business. Give me a few of your things to put up for you to take away. You can choose them by this blessed moonlight. I'll make a neat little parcel and address it to myself—I've an old label of Barker's; then it can lie on the hall table, and be ready

for you to snatch up as you pass by. Remember, the minute she goes out you put on your hat and cloak and fly. Be sure you turn left. I wish I had brought my purse; but I locked it away downstairs as usual. Now, that's about all you'd better take, or it will make too big a packet;" and Mrs. Dwyer, who was quite pleasurably excited at the idea of cheating Mrs. Dallas, gathered up the change of raiment selected by Myra.

"Will you take care of the only two treasures I have in the world?" asked Myra unsteadily. "These two pictures. I cannot take them with me."

"Give 'em to me; and wild horses shan't drag them out of me," said Mrs. Dwyer in an energetic whisper. "Hush!" she exclaimed. "Did you hear a foot outside?"

"No!" returned Myra, trembling and clinging to her.

"Be quite quiet."

A few dreadful moments passed; but all was silent.

"I don't think it was anything," said Mrs. Dwyer with a sigh of relief; "but I had better go."

"Oh, if you could only stay with me!" murmured Myra. "It is too terrible to be here alone!"

"Keep up your heart! You'll be all right if you can only get away. Mind you look cheerful and ready to go to the ends of the earth with her, when you meet Mrs. Dallas to-morrow."

Mrs. Dwyer opened the door slowly and with the utmost precaution. It was very dark on the landing, but she knew her way.

"Thank you for your great goodness to me," murmured Myra in a low tone, embracing her.

"God bless you, dear. Mind you don't let yourself be frightened—everything depends on that. Try to get a wink or two of sleep."

The gaunt, hard-looking woman spoke quite tenderly. Then she passed out noiselessly, as she had entered.

Myra carefully locked the door, and sought additional safety by burying her head under the bedclothes.

It was an awful prospect—on either hand difficulty and danger. To risk trusting herself with her aunt abroad, out of reach of Mrs. Keene or Jack Leyton, was not to be thought of; to escape and defy her entailed a fight for freedom as well as for existence. She had no plausible

reason that she could avow to justify her act; for she must never betray Mrs. Dwyer.

Poor Myra's religious education had been sorely neglected, as may be imagined; but like all young creatures gifted with heart and mind, her natural instinct in moments of difficulty was to turn for help to the Author of all Good. A few moments of tearful, wordless prayer helped her to compose herself, and confirmed her in her resolution to risk all and fly—next day or the one following, as opportunity offered. She felt calmer and stronger, but sleep refused to visit a brain so troubled; she thought and planned, and saw visions of the future more or less somber, yet not altogether unstreaked by lines of light, till dawn stole in at her window, and warned her that the moment for action was approaching.

She had, however, schooled herself so well during her long self-communing, that she presented a cheerful, composed aspect at breakfast, and that meal passed over as usual. Indeed, Mrs. Dallas was unusually agreeable and talkative. Lionel was in no hurry to go out. He sat and read the newspaper till Mrs. Dallas had finished some notes, and a list of commissions to be executed before luncheon.

"There, Lionel," she said at last, "it will save me very much if you will do all this." Lionel came over and took the list from her. "Yes, of course I'll be your agent," he said; "can't I go to the bank for you too?"

"No, thank you, dear. I must go there myself in the afternoon to settle a few matters, and I shall call at the vicarage as I return. Shall you return to luncheon?"

"Well, no, I do not think I can manage all this in time, but I shall not be long after." He left the room, and presently returned in outdoor toilet, and having received a few further instructions from his mother, departed.

What a terrible morning it was! Myra was dizzy with anxiety and dread. What would be her fate if her attempted escape was discovered and baffled? She felt without any effort at reasoning that both mother and son would exact a cruel revenge.

She went mechanically about all her aunt told her to do, while her tongue felt parched. There was a terrible moment when Mrs. Dallas said:

"Myra, I wish you would bring all your clothes down to

my room. I will share one of my large boxes with you instead of using your small one. I hope, dear, your ring is safe. You had better bring it too, and let me put it up with my jewels; I am going to take a few with me."

"Very well, aunt," returned Myra, forced into an unusual degree of duplicity.

"I shall pack your things as soon as I come in this afternoon, so have them all ready, and then we shall soon get through it."

"Thank you, aunt."

"You are looking woefully pale and miserable, Myra. What is the matter, are you nervous about our journey?"

"I believe I am."

"Nonsense! take another glass of wine. Now I must go out, or I shall be late for the bank."

These sentences were exchanged at luncheon. The decisive moment was at hand. Mrs. Dallas, carefully arrayed as usual, sallied through the hall, and noticed a brown paper parcel lying on a chair. "Hum, our good Mrs. Dwyer has been indulging in finery at Barker's, I see," she said, and passed out through the door Myra held open for her. That remark seemed to raise her courage. So much of Mrs. Dwyer's plan was successful, perhaps the rest would go well, too. She flew upstairs to put on her hat and cloak, ringing to give notice to Mrs. Dwyer, hoping to meet her in the hall.

As she descended the stairs, her gloves in her hand, she beheld Mrs. Dwyer, indeed—but Mrs. Dwyer speaking to Lionel, who had just admitted himself with the latch key. He was facing the stairs; he saw her; it was hopeless to evade him. A despairing glance from Mrs. Dwyer seemed to fire her with sudden desperate courage, to sharpen her wits and rouse her invention.

"Going out?" asked Lionel with some surprise, as she advanced toward him.

"Yes," returned Myra with a coolness that astonished herself. "I am going to change some wools my aunt bought yesterday at Brown's," naming a fancy shop in Earl's Court; "she said if you were back, perhaps you would come with me."

"Yes, of course, with pleasure," returned Lionel readily, and following her into the dining room.

Myra continued putting on her gloves, and thinking what she should do next. Then she looked in the drawer of a work table, and in a work bag, apparently in vain. "I must have left them in my aunt's room," she exclaimed; "I am always giving myself trouble by my forgetfulness," and she left the room. Lionel, who never stood when he could sit, had at once dropped into a rocking chair, near the fireplace, and behind the open door. There he lounged for a minute or two, feeling pleased by Myra's increased cordiality of manner, when the front door shut with a violent slam. In a second Lionel was on his feet, had snatched up his hat and was in the street—a quick conviction piercing through him that Myra had given him the slip. He was right. His keen eyes at once detected her running rapidly, and already almost at the corner of the street where it joined Salisbury Avenue. She looked back before she turned it, no doubt to see if she were followed. He had already started in pursuit at the top of his speed, and he could run fast.

Melford Road was little frequented, and at that moment there was no one else in sight. He was close upon her heels; in a minute more he would capture her, and then—but he did not stop to reason. He was round the corner; a long length of road lay right and left of him, quite clear of passengers save a baker's boy with a basket on his arm, who was whistling as he came along, and a stout, elderly lady, both coming up from the direction in which Myra had run. He asked the boy, who met him first, if he had seen a young lady. No, the youth had seen "ne'er a one." A few yards further on a narrow street on the opposite side of the road branched off to the north. Fool that he was! of *course* she had turned down it. What a pace she must have gone! It couldn't last; he would soon come up with her. There were few cabs about and she must be penniless; his mother took good care of that. These thoughts sustained him as he tore along, on and on, in vain. No sign of the quarry. Suddenly he stopped. It was impossible she could have gone so far at such a rate, and the street he was in had no side openings, nor had he met a cab or seen even the back of one. Had she taken refuge in a house? If so, in which, and what friend had she to plot with? Had she escaped him—had she escaped his clever,

resolute mother? How were they to recover her—what excuse could they make—what excuse could she make? Would it be excuse enough for putting her in a lunatic asylum? He ground his sharp, white teeth with fury at the idea of this simple girl, whom he and his mother looked upon as their lawful prey, outwitting and outmaneuvering him. He did not venture to stir a step without his mother, and she might not return for another hour.

Crestfallen, a hell of baffled wickedness raging in his soul, he walked back to Melford Road, streaming at every pore. After a few moments' pause to recover and cool himself, he rang and asked for Mrs. Dwyer.

"Did you know Miss Dallas had gone out?" he said.

"Yes, sir"—stolidly. "I heard her ask you to go with her, and then you slammed the door in a way——"

"Damn the door!" interrupted young Ashby rudely. "Somehow I have missed her, and it is too provoking."

"Where was she going, sir"—innocently.

"Oh, to some shop, about wool for my mother."

"That will be Fisher's, sir. Well, she won't be long, unless, indeed, she goes on to see Miss Browne."

Here was an infernal suggestion. And yet, would Lady Shirland or Dorothea believe a word against his mother or himself? No.

"Well she may," he said, remembering he had better keep things quiet. After all, Myra had nothing—nothing whatever—to complain of, and he himself would come out well as a fine, generous young fellow ready to marry a penniless girl with the bar sinister on her scutcheon into the bargain, by Jove! Still, it was the devil's own business.

"Do you want anything more, sir?" asked Mrs. Dwyer demurely.

"No—yes, some brandy and soda. I'll wait till Miss Dallas comes back."

"Very well, sir,"—turning to leave the room.

"And a long wait you'll have. The poor dear young lady is the right sort after all. She'll get out of their clutches now. She did him nicely. If I could only have given her a few shillings."

Descending to her own territories, Mrs. Dwyer despatched "the gurl" with the desired refreshment, and then sat down to enjoy an unusually large crop of horrors in

Lloyd's Weekly, with the proud feeling that she was herself engaged in the working out of a plot, in no way below those of the famous *Miscellany* in interest.

It was, indeed, a bad half hour spent by Lionel Ashby while waiting for his mother's return. In a way he dominated her, and on the other hand he feared her. To gain comfort and courage, he helped himself to brandy pure and simple when the soda-water was exhausted.

It was nearly four o'clock when she came in; it had been about half-past two when he had returned from his ineffectual chase.

Mrs. Dallas was going straight upstairs to the drawing room when "the gurl" said, "If you please 'm, Mr. Ashby is in the dining room." She turned in there, and seeing him lounging in his favorite rocking-chair, began with good-humored playfulness, "You lazy boy——"

He interrupted her by starting up and closing the door carefully; then, facing her with pale cheeks and wide-opened eyes, he said in a low, hoarse voice:

"Mother, she is gone; she has run away!"

"Myra!" she returned, letting the parcel she held drop. "Impossible! How—when—where?"

Lionel replied by detailing the particulars of Myra's escape, and a very accurate account he gave. It was of too vital importance to suppress or exaggerate any detail.

"You were an idiot to let her out of your sight," was her fierce comment.

"I did not think I had. She asked me to go out with her, and——"

"That of itself ought to have raised your suspicions. You have gone near to ruin all my plans—all my carefully arranged plans—and make all I have striven to do useless. You are so impetuous—so absolutely idiotic! Call a cab for me directly. She will try to hide with Mrs. Keene. I must be there as soon as herself. She had no money—at least, I suppose not."

"You can't be sure, mother. How do you know there is not some infernal man helping her outside?"

"I don't believe that! She has been well watched; and few men care to champion penniless girls who haven't even a name to call their own. Go bring a cab quick—there is

no time to lose! That woman Keene will not dare to resist me!"

It was past three o'clock when Mrs. Keene retired, as was her wont, to her private parlor for half an hour's reading and repose. She had settled herself with the morning paper in peace; for her granddaughter was beginning to be a great help, as she developed decidedly business faculties and an aptitude for keeping the servants up to the collar. So Mrs. Keene enjoyed her mid-day breathing space all the more, as she knew that Wilhelmina was out and about. The good woman had only just begun to experience the first delightful symptoms of drowsiness, when Wilhelmina burst in, greatly excited, and exclaimed:

"Lor', grannie, Miss Dallas is outside at the side door! I'm going to let her in. I'm sure she has run away."

She dashed through the door communicating with the next house.

"Why, goodness, gracious me!" cried Mrs. Keene, wide awake in a moment and bustling after her, but pausing to turn the key in the lock of the door by which Wilhelmina had entered. "Miss Myra, my dear child, what's the matter?"

There in the small square entry stood Myra, white to the lips, with a strained, hunted look in her eyes, her parcel held tightly against her breast.

"I have run away," she whispered; "and I will never go back. Will you take me in for a little while?"

"Ay, my dear, for a long while. Have they been treating you bad?"

"No, no—not at all. I will tell you all about it when my heart does not beat so fast."

"They'll be after you, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I had quite an extraordinary escape; for Lionel chased me before I was three minutes out of the house."

"Then you mustn't be found here. Willy, take her up to your room; and put on your hat and things. I'll bring up some wine and a biscuit, and tell you what's to be done."

With a sense of unspeakable relief, Myra followed Wilhelmina upstairs, and, sinking on the nearest chair, let the long-threatening tears flow at last.

Mrs. Keene soon made her appearance, breathless with hospitable haste, and carrying the promised refreshment.

"There, missie, you drink up that glass of port—it is real good—and eat a biscuit. Now listen to me, Willy, while you put on your things. You take Miss Dallas up this little street, call the first cab you see, and drive to Mr. Dobbs, the Railway Hotel. It aint a grand place, but clean and respectable. Mr. Dobbs is a great friend of mine and of Keene's; and you'll have a nice room and safe till we can turn ourselves round. You tell Mr. Dobbs for me, Willy, that I haven't room for Miss—don't you say Dallas, anything will do—Smith—ay, Miss Smith—so I'm answerable for all expenses. Order a nice dinner, and you stay with her till I come, which won't be till late. It's likely Mrs. Dallas may drive up any minute; and she'll put on detectives, and the Lord knows what. *I* can't tell what rights she may have to claim you. *I do* wish Keene were here, *I do*! Were's Mr. Leyton?"

"In Paris or Brussels. He wrote to me, but I was in such a hurry to tear up the letter that I have forgotten his address."

"Dear, dear—that's a pity! We'll keep things quiet till we can find him. Men—especially gentlemen—know a heap *we* don't. Are you ready, Willy—are you ready?"

"Yes, grannie."

"Well, you go out the front door, as if you were going shopping, and turn toward town; then you can get back a little higher up by Carter Mews—it's pretty quiet at that time—and wait a little above there. In ten minutes I'll let Miss Myra out by the side door."

"All right, gran'! Suppose I take Miss Myra's parcel—that will look like shopping?"

"Well thought! Off with you!"

When she was gone, Mrs. Keene took Myra in her arms and kissed her.

"You'll excuse me, my poor dear child," she said, her kind eyes full of tears, "but I thank God that I have a chance of paying back a little bit of the debt I owe your angel mother. It wasn't only that I owe her my life; but when that was done, she was so sweet, so friendly. I wish she had been spared to know you and love you."

"And be my friend—my protectress. I am so awfully alone, Mrs. Keene."

"So you are, my poor lamb; but you'll find friends—I am sure you will. Come, now, let's go look for Willy—it's time you were out of this. Mrs. Dallas might be here any moment; and I want to pull myself together before she comes. She is a deep, shrewd woman. Come away!"

They descended to the little entry. Mrs. Keene opened the street door and peeped forth twice. The second time she drew in her head triumphantly.

"There she is—four or five houses up. Go on, my dear. God bless you! Keep up your heart! I'll be with you about eight—or before, maybe."

She watched till she saw the two girls meet and walk away in a northerly direction. Then she returned to her parlor, replaced the key in its usual position, settled herself in her arm chair, and took up her paper.

"I must have my wits about me with that woman," she mused; "she is as deep as a well. I must just forget I have seen the dear young lady, and seem as frightened as I should be if I didn't know where she was. Ah, I didn't live with Russians for nothing."

She turned her eyes on the paper with very vague ideas as to what was printed there. Hardly had she thus composed herself when one of the servants entered to say that Mrs. Dallas wished to speak with her.

"Oh, show her in," cried Mrs. Keene, in a loud, cheerful tone, judging—and justly—that the visitor had followed closely.

Mrs. Dallas looked darker than ever, and her eyes were unusually bright when she walked in. She kept a fair countenance, however, and bade Mrs. Keene "Good-morning" graciously enough.

"Pray, is my niece with you?" she asked, gently.

"Miss Myra?"—in a surprised tone. "Was she coming to see me, 'm?"

"I am not sure; I thought she might."

"No, I haven't seen her for weeks, 'm—not since the evening I took the liberty of calling at your house."

"Indeed!"—looking at her very keenly. "Are you quite sure she has not been here?"

"I am ready to answer she never crossed that threshold

since you were here with her;" and Mrs. Keene looked toward the door by which her visitor had just entered. Her tone was so unhesitating that Mrs. Dallas felt baffled.

"I am amazed," she said, after a moment's thought. "If you will be silent in the matter I shall trust you with the reason of my inquiries, for I wish to keep the whole thing secret. Miss Dallas has left my house, my protection—run away, in short."

"But—my goodness, gracious!—what made her do that? Had you any falling out?"

"No, not at all. I only fear she may have formed some acquaintance, some attachment, unknown to me, and of which I would disapprove, and eloped with a lover."

"Dear, dear!—the folly of girls! Young ladies, and all! Have you no idea at all who it might be, 'm?"

"No; have you?"—sharply. It struck her quick sense that Mrs. Keene would have shown more emotion if such a possibility was then presented to her for the first time.

"Me? No, I have no notion. But, goodness, gracious! aren't you going to advertise and set detectives on her track? Why, my head's just turning at the idea of the poor young lady wandering about in the hands of some villain. How was it you took your eyes off her?"

This outburst took Mrs. Dallas rather back.

"I did keep her pretty close, but I had no reason to doubt her. How she got away I cannot think, for I don't believe she had a penny in her pocket."

"Kept her like that, the cruel slave driver!" thought Mrs. Keene. "Then depend upon it, someone out helped her," she said aloud.

"I fancy so," said Mrs. Dallas, rising, seeing she could make nothing of her interlocutor. "I must go now to secure the help of the police."

"Ay, do, 'm, and lose no time. Then you will advertise, I suppose? I'd put it in the penny papers as well as the *Times*, if I was you."

"It's an awful business. My great desire is to shield the poor, silly girl from scandal. I am still willing to take her back, though she has been shamefully ungrateful."

"Well, that is not like her, Mrs. Dallas."

"No, certainly not; which makes me feel all the more

convinced that she is acting under some influence unknown to us."

"It certainly looks like it," returned Mrs. Keene, following her with deferential politeness.

At the door Mrs. Dallas turned and cast one comprehensive, hungry, unsatisfied look round the room.

"Good-morning," she said, with a slight bend of the head as she passed out. "Cunning old fox! She knows more than she pretends," was her mental commentary.

"You may suspect, but you can't prove," thought Mrs. Keene.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

MYRA experienced a delicious sense of safety and freedom when the landlord of the Railway Hotel, a modest hostelry near King's Cross, received her and the protecting Wilhelmina with frank, kind civility. Any friend of Mr. and Mrs. Keene was especially welcome. There was a nice, large, airy room at the young lady's service, rather high up, but quiet and comfortable. Was any luggage coming?

"Not to-day," said Wilhelmina, with presence of mind; "but my grandmamma will be here later and let you know."

The room to which they were conducted was cheerful and comfortable, and furnished so as to serve as sitting and bedroom both. Having asked and received instructions (from Wilhelmina) regarding tea with cold tongue and water-cress, the friendly host left them to themselves, to Wilhelmina's great delight.

"Let me help you off with your hat and cape, Miss Myra, and put away your things. Oh, do tell me all about everything; I am just dying to know! Did they treat you cruel bad?"

"No, no, indeed! Only I grew stupidly frightened; and even now I am not sure whether I have been foolish or wise. You see I had grown nervous and unhappy. I am sure no one *can* be happy living in ~~after~~ dependence on another, unless, indeed, it is upon ~~one's~~ own father or mother. Oh, Willy! my head seems turning round still. I thought my heart would burst with beating when I turned and saw Lionel running after me."

"Dear, dear! What is he like? Is he very ugly?"

"No, by no means. He is good-looking, and can be very pleasant."

"My goodness! Well, that's funny!" cried Wilhelmina, still highly excited, and rapidly arranging Myra's few belongings in drawers and wardrobe, while she continued to

ply her with questions, which she only partially answered, adding, "for you know, Willy, dear, I want to tell Mrs. Keene every little thing when she comes."

"And you will let me stay and hear it all?" cried Willy.

"Oh, certainly, of course." So Wilhelmina, finding she must wait, filled up the time by imparting much information respecting the hotel, grannie, grandpa, and the new piano he was going to buy her; the lessons she had been taking from Herr Roscher—the celebrated pianist, and how he had said it was a shame that she, who was half German, could not speak a word of that beautiful, magnificent language. Tea also helped to pass the time; still, it seemed woefully long till Mrs. Keene made her appearance, though she came sooner than she had promised.

"Well, my dear young lady," she exclaimed breathlessly, when she sat down to rest after her ascent, "I have been burning to come, but I didn't dare to till things were pretty well over for the day. *She* has been with me, and I can tell you I shook in my shoes under those wicked black eyes of hers. But she got precious little out of me, I can tell you. No, dear, no tea for me. Just begin and tell me everything; we have a good bit to settle about, and I mustn't stay too long. Willy, dear, you had better go home, as——"

"Me? No, that I won't!" interrupted Willy, "till I've heard everything."

"Well, stay then! Now, Miss Myra, my dear?"

Whereupon Myra began—starting from the first warning of Mrs. Dwyer, and describing their nocturnal interview; her despair at the sudden appearance of Lionel, her ruse to evade him—at which Willy clapped her hands—and then her horror on discovering that he was in hot pursuit. "I felt as if all was over," continued Myra, pushing back her hair in the eagerness of narration, "but I fled on. Turning the corner, I saw a gentleman standing on the pavement speaking to the driver of a hansom, his back was to me. I never hesitated, as there was not another spot I could find shelter in. I passed the gentleman and sprang into the cab. In all my agony of fear I saw the wonder in his eyes. 'Oh, do let me go a little way in your cab! I am in such a dreadful hurry—any way, only for a few minutes, do, do, do!' I suppose I looked wild and miserable, for he just said,

[Redacted]

"‘I must say you look all right,’ he said. By that time we came to the Circus, and the cab stopped opposite Peter Robinson’s. He handed me out most politely, saying very kindly, ‘I suppose I must not go farther with you?’

"‘Oh, no! pray do not!’ I exclaimed, ‘and do forget all about me!’

"‘That’s not so easy!’ were his last words, as I hurried on to Gilbert Street. Thank God! Willy saw me as I watched for a chance to get in unseen."

"Yes," interrupted Wilhelmina. "I had gone into the front parlor to see if it had been properly cleaned after those untidy Australians, and going to the window I saw a young lady with a parcel pass at the other side of the street. I thought she was like Miss Myra, and as I stood watching she turned and stopped, looking toward our door, then I saw it was Miss Myra. I ran to the door, but somehow it came to me from the way she stopped that she did not wish to be seen, so I pointed to the corner, thinking she would see I meant to open the side door for her. So she did, and I don’t believe a soul knows she came into our house."

"My goodness, gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Keene. "I never heard anything so wonderful and extraordinary. I could never have believed, missee, you’d have had such pluck and presence of mind. Now the great point is, what to do next? They must not find you too soon, of course they *will* find you; nobody can keep hidden always. But if you could keep out of the way till you are twenty-one, then you can do as you like and live where you please. I am awful ignorant about such things, so I’m not sure whether Mrs. Dallas could force you back if you were still an infant, as they call it. Mightn’t you ask Mr. Leyton?"

"I might; he will not be long away."

"How would it do to speak to Lady Shirland?"

"Oh, no; she thinks so much of my aunt, she would not listen to me, and I should not like to speak against Mrs. Dallas to her best friend. Perhaps I ought to have had more courage and patience; perhaps Mrs. Dwyer exaggerated. I do not know whether to rejoice because I have escaped, or to be ashamed of having taken fright."

"My dear young lady, I am thankful you have come to me. Now you had better not stay with us. But I’ll tell you

what I can do; I'll run down to my sisters' at Redworth, and see what I can settle with them. You must keep close till I can get you away. At any rate, you are safe here. I am afraid even of your being with my sisters, though they would make much of you; but, you see, that woman will set on detectives, and they'll hunt up everything and every person connected with me, for she must know you'd come to me. If we can keep quiet till I can ask Mr. Leyton, or till Keene comes back, then we may make no mistake."

"I will do whatever you think best, dear, kind friend, and—here, I have saved this, thanks to poor Mrs. Dwyer." She drew forth the ring she had concealed so successfully, and handed it to her faithful ally. "Will you take that and sell it for me, and give me a little of the money? Keep the rest, for I fear I shall cost you a great deal."

"My!" ejaculated Wilhelmina, "what a beauty—a great big, blue sapphire."

"Why, sapphires are always blue, you silly," said her grandmother. "This is worth a good deal, missee," she continued. "I'll see to it, so do not disturb yourself about money. I have brought you a little—half a sovereign in gold and the rest in change; you'll not want to spend anything here. To-morrow, early, I'll run down to my sisters' and be back by the evening. Then we'll see what to do."

"I should like to send a few lines to Mrs. Dallas to say I am safe and well."

"She don't deserve it, Miss Myra; you don't seem to see all the vile wickedness she was plotting against you."

"I do not quite believe it; besides—"

"It will only serve to put those devils on your track."

"Well, then, I shall wait; but I must send Mrs. Dwyer a line."

"That's another matter. We'll get the barmaid below to address it or—no, maybe I'd best do it myself. I wish you'd let that alone too, missee."

"Oh, I do not like to leave her without some intimation that I am safe and well."

After some discussion, it was decided that Myra should write to Mrs. Dwyer, but leave her aunt for the present in the dark.

This note written, Mrs. Keene insisted on Wilhelmina returning home.

"We had best not go back together," she said. "What o'clock is it, Willy?"

"Ten minutes to nine."

"Oh, it's too late, then. I had a mind to run down to my sisters' straight away this very evening, for I may have a detective after me to-morrow; so I will be off at cock-crow to-morrow morning. Come, you get off, Willy."

"Don't be late, grannie," returned that young lady, preparing reluctantly to depart. "I may come and see Miss Myra to-morrow, mayn't I?"

"I'm not sure, my dear; we'll seen what turns up. Miss Myra is too brave to mind being left alone when it's for her own good."

"No, of course not, but I should like a book, or something to do."

"Yes, sure; we have a good lot at home. They are a bit battered; people leave them behind when they have done with them. Willy will manage to bring or send them. If she doesn't come you may be sure it aint safe."

Wilhelmina departed, having taken a very effusive farewell of Myra, and Mrs. Keene remained to speak a few comforting words to the desolate girl, who, worn out with the terror and excitement she had undergone, shrank from being left alone in this strange place.

"There's nothing can happen to you, dearie," urged Mrs. Keene. "Dobbs is a good, honest soul as ever lived, there's a lock to your door, and you're as safe as you can be. You will hear from or see one of us to-morrow. God bless you, my dear! Its' a bad bit of the road for you, but it won't last long. I wish you could remember Mr. Leyton's address. Mightn't you write to him to his place in town?"

"I might—but—but—I hardly like to trouble him."

"My dear, all he wants is to help you. I dare say your father was a good friend to him, as your dear mother was to me. Well—well, if you have nothing else to leave your children, it's something to bequeath them your claims to gratitude. Try to sleep, and try to eat; for if we don't keep the body in working order the mind is no good."

Left alone, Myra lost no time in retiring to rest. Fa-

tigue had done its work; and, contrary to her expectations, she slept profoundly.

Mrs. Keene got home as fast as she could. She found Wilhelmina waiting for her with a troubled face.

"I don't know what to think," she said, "and I don't know what you'll think, grannie; but I had hardly got my hat off when I came back, before a gentleman drove up with a hat-box and a portmanteau, and asked if we could take him in. They brought him to me. I said you were in bed with a bad headache, and that we never took in anyone without an introduction. He said he had met grandfather at Biarritz about a week ago—you know he *was* going there—that Lord Hargrave was coming back in about a month, and that he had promised grandfather to come straight here. He had been a courier himself, but he left off, and has come to London on a little business; so I let him have the front parlor and the little bedroom on the first landing."

"I don't like the look of it," said Mrs. Keene, sitting down suddenly. "What is he like?"

"Oh, a quiet, simple, broad-faced man, clean shaved, and very well dressed. He made no trouble at all about money."

"I dare say not. I wish you hadn't had a spot to put him in."

"But, grannie, I was afraid of turning away a friend of gran'dad's. He looks quite nice—a little like a German."

"He's none the better for that—any way, we'll see. I am just dead beat, Willie; and I wanted to be off by the seven train to-morrow. But I think I'll wait a bit later, and have a look at our new guest. It's as well not to leave *you* alone with him. Now come to bed; I expect I'll do a lot of thinking there."

It was with a maddening sense of defeat that Mrs. Dallas re-entered her cab after her abortive interview with the proprietor of Keene's Hotel. Her belief that Myra had taken refuge there was not for a moment shaken; but to prove it was the difficulty.

"Short as the time was, she has got her off, I fancy. I cannot fathom this extraordinary step of Myra's. I could not have believed she would have done anything so decided;

yet I don't think it is possible she could have communicated with anyone. She has always seemed transparent—she *is* transparent. What an outrageous insult it seems that she should be able to snap her fingers at us," thought Mrs. Dallas bitterly, as she rumbled southwestward to report progress to her son, whom she left in a state bordering on temporary insanity.

"Who can have helped her? I have a vague idea that Mrs. Dwyer had a kind of sympathy with Myra; but she is a grasping woman, and, unless she thought she could make something by it, she would not have moved in the matter. I must get Lionel to ascertain where Keene is. He will find out at Lord Hargrave's house."

Lionel was watching for her at the dining room window, and ran out to meet her. As soon as they had closed the door he exclaimed:

"What news?"

"None. We were not quick enough. Mrs. Keene's manner was so unhesitating, so decided, that I believe she was not in the house. But she must have gone there. I know of no other place where she could possibly go, unless there is a lover in the case."

"Which I am inclined to think there is," cried Lionel. "Some infernal cold-blooded Englishman—nothing else can account for her indifference to me—and Leyton is the man. I wish—I wish I had my fingers on his throat!" and he walked up and down the room in an agony of anger and mortification.

"I am sure you are mistaken. Leyton is not the sort of man to care for a mere unformed girl like——"

"You know nothing about it," interrupted Lionel rudely. "No woman understands the attraction of another. I would give my soul for Myra—if I have one. Get her for me, or I'll look on you as an enemy—a detested enemy!"

"My dear, dear Lionel, you must have lost your senses. You know I would risk everything to gratify you," cried Mrs. Dallas. "Listen to me; for you can do nothing without me. Remember that if we do not trace her soon she will be lost to us; for I am very uncertain what power I may possess to reclaim her. The influence of my presence, if I can pounce upon her quickly, may compel her to return. Meantime, our best plan is to create an impression that

she is of unsound mind; then, if the question arises of her sanity, and I am willing to undertake the maintenance of a pauper lunatic, I do not doubt I should acquire a legal right to her guardianship. With this object I shall give the utmost publicity to her flight. I shall cross-examine Mrs. Dwyer, and apply to Lady Shirland for advice, and—Shall I play a bold game, and ask information from Leyton?”

“No, a thousand devils, no!” said Lionel, pausing in his march to and fro. “He used to be in Munich, God knows what he may have learned. It is this delay that endangers everything; curse her stupid obstinacy. I could curse her, ay, and torture her between the kisses I long to press upon that sweet mouth of hers!”

“Do not lose your self-control, Lionel, and never, *never* let anyone but myself hear you speak in this way. Can you not see that the only chance of success in *any* scheme is to hold the reins of your impulses so that none shall *ever* know the truth about your wishes, your intentions. Be guided by me. Obey me, both in the spirit and in the letter, and I swear you shall have this sweet, blue-eyed fool to kiss or crush as you like.”

Lionel stood for a moment in thought. Then he passed his hand over his face, and said with sudden calmness:

“I put myself into your hands, and if you succeed——”

“You will love your mother, Lionel? You will return her something of the devotion——” She tried to put her arms round him as she spoke.

“Oh, yes! of course,” he interrupted impatiently, giving her a rapid kiss on the brow; “but don’t let us waste time in sentimentalizing. What do you propose to do?”

Mrs. Dallas drew back and sighed.

“First I shall interview Mrs. Dwyer. Then you must go to Lord Hargrave’s house—there’s the address, it is quite near—ascertain where they are, where they are going, when they are expected home. Take pencil and note book, write all down, make no mistake; be sure to find out if Keene is with them. Then go to Dempsey’s Private Inquiry Office, and ask for one of their best men to meet me here, as soon as possible. He must come prepared for immediate service. I shall go to Lady Shirland. Above all, be calm.”

She rang, and both kept profound silence till Mrs. Dwyer presented herself.

"Pray, sit down, Mrs. Dwyer, I want to speak to you," began Mrs. Dallas in a most friendly tone. "We are terribly puzzled about my niece. Did she say anything to you about staying out this evening? going to Lady Shirland's, or to Mrs. Keene's?"

"Is it to me, ma'am? Not a syllable. What's gone with her, ma'am?"

"Well, I cannot make out exactly. Did you see her go out?"

"No, 'm. I did hear her ask Mr. Ashby to go with her to some shop. Then I heard the door bang, a bit after, and thought they had gone together; that's all I know."

"She has not returned, and I feel a little uneasy."

"Law, ma'am! maybe she has only gone to see Mrs. Keene, and will be back presently."

"Unfortunately, I have lost that hope; I have been to Mrs. Keene's and she has not been there. It is a little alarming; for such a causeless disappearance, when we were on such friendly terms, so confidential, that knowing her poor father was slightly insane at one time, I feel very anxious. Pray, Mrs. Dwyer, have you seen any symptoms of unsoundness in the poor, dear girl?"

"Well, 'm," slowly "I am not sure that I have. She was a little queer about a ring she had; she had a fancy that someone wanted to steal it."

"How strange!" cried Mrs. Dallas, with a quick glance at her son; "surely she did not suspect that nice, respectable Jane?"

"Oh, dear, no, 'm!" dryly.

"Pray, when did she speak of this to you?"

"Oh! one morning I went in to wind the dining room clock, 'm."

"That did not look like sanity?"

"Well, no, 'm. It *was* a little queer."

"I shall go to Lady Shirland's before I take off my bonnet," resumed Mrs. Dallas, "and if she is not there, nor at the school, why I must advertise. It is a most painful business."

"I wouldn't be in too great a hurry, 'm; she may be in in an hour or two; it's not half-past seven yet!"

"I shall look if she has taken any clothes with her. If not, she had, no doubt, the intention of returning."

"That's true! Are you sure you know what things she had?"

"Very nearly, seeing they are almost all my gifts."

"See that, now! I'm sure you were a real mother to her, 'm."

"You think so, Mrs. Dwyer?"

"Oh, yes, that I do, ma'am!"

"I will not detain you any longer, Mrs. Dwyer. Come, Lionel, my dear, give me your arm to Lady Shirland's, I really feel hardly able to stand."

"I will get you a cab, mother. You are quite unfit to walk."

Once in the street, they parted company, Lionel going on his errand, and Mrs. Dallas proceeding to Caterham Gardens, where she was informed that "Her ladyship was at dinner, as she was going to the theater."

"I will wait till she has finished, if she is alone with Miss Browne."

"Her ladyship has no company, ma'am, and dinner is nearly over."

Mrs. Dallas had not waited more than a few minutes in the morning room, when both Lady Shirland and Miss Browne appeared.

"What in the world is the matter, my dear Mrs. Dallas?" cried the former.

"You look awfully upset," said Miss Browne.

"I *am*, dear. I have come to ask what I now fear is a useless question. Have you seen or heard anything of Myra to-day?"

"Of Myra? No. Why what has happened?" cried Lady Shirland and Dorothea together.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, "I do not know what has become of her. On my return from the city this afternoon I found my poor dear boy in a state of distraction."

She proceeded to give the details of Myra's flight.

"It seems incredible that she should be so painfully foolish," exclaimed Lady Shirland at the end of the narrative, "as to risk forfeiting all the advantages a residence

with you secures. Depend upon it, it is some freak. You will find her at home when you return."

"Alas! I fear not," said Mrs. Dallas, in a voice broken by emotion. "I have looked in her wardrobe, and she has evidently taken clothes, etc., with her."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dorothea, clasping her hands, "whom can she have eloped with?"

"Pray, why do you suppose she must have eloped with anyone, Dorothea?" asked Lady Shirland sharply.

"Well, is it not the most likely thing, mamma?"

"No doubt," said Mrs. Dallas, drying her tearless eyes and recovering herself; "but I agree with dear Lady Shirland—I do not think she has eloped with anyone."

"Have you gone to Mr. Leyton's lodgings?" said Dorothea.

"Why, he is away—he is in Paris," cried Lady Shirland.

"He *was*," returned Dorothea emphatically; "but he may have returned. Indeed, it may be useless to inquire at his usual abode."

"Why, Dorothea, you are making Jack Leyton out a villain," said Lady Shirland indignantly.

"I don't wish to do so; but if Myra has run away from her happy home *without* a companion, why, she must be mad."

"That is just it, dear Dorothea," said Mrs. Dallas dependently. "I am much more inclined to believe that some sudden failure of reason, rather than flight with a lover, actuated poor Myra. A gentler, more delicate, modest creature never existed. She had become quite a laughing-stock to me." (Handkerchief again.)

"It is deplorable and inexplicable," observed Lady Shirland. "In any case, my dear Mrs. Dallas, I should let Mr. Leyton know. He is greatly interested in the unhappy girl, and—— You'll excuse us if we leave you. We have to pick up Lady Georgina Leslie on the way so——"

"Oh, certainly—of course. Can you give me Mr. Leyton's address—his Paris address?"

"No; but write to his lodgings—they will forward the letter."

"I certainly will, Lady Shirland; and don't let me detain you."

"The carriage is at the door. Let them take you home while we are putting on our cloaks. *Do* let me have a line to say if you have had any news; and advertise, my dear Mrs. Dallas. Lose no time. Thomas, tell the coachman to set Mrs. Dallas down and return for us."

Cordial good-nights were exchanged.

"Well, 'm, any news of the poor dear young lady?" asked Mrs. Dwyer anxiously.

She had come to the door herself when Mrs. Dallas rang.

"None, I am sorry to say," dejectedly. "Hasn't my son come in yet?"

"No, 'm; no one has come. There are some letters for you in the dining room."

They were ordinary notes and circulars; so Mrs. Dallas asked for tea, and waited as patiently as she could for more than an hour. Then a cab stopped, there was a ring, and Lionel entered with an eager, almost hopeful look.

"I have got all the information you wanted, mother, and the best man they have at Dempsey's. He is outside. Shall I bring him in?"

"By all means. We'll do something now."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BREATHING SPACE.

THOROUGHLY worn out by the fatigue and excitement of the day, Myra slept soundly and woke refreshed. It was some minutes before she could shake off the puzzled, dazed sensation of waking in a totally strange place, and recall the circumstances which led her there. The more she thought, the more troubled she was concerning her own conduct. Had she been too precipitate? Had she given too ready credence to Mrs. Dwyer? Perhaps so. But while she spoke it had seemed to Myra that all she said, all she suggested, was absolute truth. Perhaps she ought to have declared her intention of leaving her openly to Mrs. Dallas. But could she have carried out that intention? She did not know what powers her aunt might possess. At all events, Mrs. Dwyer's communication put her into a wild state of terror, and rendered her quite incapable of reasoning. Even now, when she was comparatively safe and calm, she shuddered at the idea of being alone with Mrs. Dallas and her son, away from the very few in whom she trusted. Yes; she had done well in escaping. When would Mrs. Keene come to talk with and comfort her?

An elderly, good-natured looking chambermaid brought her breakfast, and with it a little note addressed to "Miss Smith."

It was from Wilhelmina, and was very brief, "My mother desires me to say that she cannot come to see you till the afternoon; then one or other of us will be sure to come."

It was a long and miserable morning, partly spent in reading the *Times* diligently, partly in musing over the difficulties before her. What should she do to earn her living? Would Mrs. Fairchild take her back? No! she greatly feared she would not. When should she have a chance of taking counsel with Jack Leyton? He could solve all her doubts, and advise her how to act. The weary

hours dragged through. She made a pretense of eating some dinner, and had noticed that the clock over a shop opposite had just struck half-past two, when someone tapped at the door. Myra went to it and hesitated, when a voice said through the keyhole, "It's *me*, Miss Myra," and Myra gladly opened to admit Wilhelmina, who, rather to her dismay, was followed by a tall, thin, hard-featured woman, with dark hair and eyes, high cheek-bones, a good deal of color, and a generally weather-beaten complexion. She was well, even handsomely dressed in thick brown silk, a brown straw bonnet profusely decorated with yellow daisies, and a large black lace shawl.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Myra," exclaimed Wilhelmina. "This is grannie's sister, Miss Foley. I call her auntie. Grannie couldn't come herself. I'll tell you all about it." She dragged in a small valise and shut the door as she spoke, turning the key.

"I am very pleased to see any relations of dear Mrs. Keene," said Myra warmly.

"Thank you, miss. I have come here just on purpose to help you. Mrs. Keene has told me all about everything, and often and often have I heard her talk of your good mamma. You'll please come away with me to my place for a bit. Though it is but a shop, you shall be safe and comfortable till such time as things come right. Here's a letter from my sister, who tells you all about it."

Myra took and read the following letter:

I can't come and see you, missee, my dear; a horrid man has taken the front parlor, and I'm not sure but he may be spying on me, so I won't venture out. I telegraphed for my sister, and told her your whole story, so she is ready to take care of you for some weeks. You go with her, my dear, for she is a good, faithful woman, and so's my younger sister, Letitia. You will be happy with them, and when I think it is safe I will come and see you. Willy will tell you all the rest. I have given my sister a little bit of money for you—five pounds—on account of the ring. You make it go as far as you can. God bless you! my dear young lady. Your ever attached and respectful,

C. KEENE.

"How good of you to take this trouble for me!" cried Myra with moist eyes; "I am so ashamed of causing it all."

"Oh, never mind that, miss, if only we can make things

right, and they will come right, I have no doubt," said Miss Foley.

"And, oh, Miss Myra!" cried Wilhelmina triumphantly, "we have had a time of it! Last night, quite late, just before grannie came home, a man drove up with luggage, and took a room, saying he knew father, and had promised him to come to our hotel. I didn't like to turn him away, but grannie, she was almost angry with me for letting him in. I don't think there's any harm in the man; he writes a good bit in the window, and is in and out and up and down the passage. So gran' would not go down to see auntie, but telegraphed for her to come up. I took the telegram my own self at eight this morning, and auntie was with us at twelve. Then grannie went in as sweet and civil as ever could be, and asked Mr. Merrydew (which is his name, he says) into dinner, and just mentions auntie as an old customer. We had a real good dinner—ducks and peas, and a sole *au plat*—and didn't Mr. What's-his-name enjoy it; but just as the pudding was coming in—stewed rhubarb with Devonshire cream—auntie jumped up and said she had no end of shopping to do, and to catch the down train at five o'clock.

"'Where to, ma'am?' says our visitor, who was looking quite lazy, he had eaten such a good dinner. Something put it into my mouth to say 'Hastings.' I didn't think a bit, it just came! Then says aunt, 'Come, get ready, my dear, you know you promised to help me.' I had my hat and gloves at hand, so we were ready in a jiffy, popped into a cab, stopped it before we got to the Langham, hailed a 'bus, and here we are! I don't think Mr. Thing-a-me-bob has got over his dinner yet!"

"You are a wonderful girl, Wilhelmina!" exclaimed Myra, laughing.

"She aint dull," said Miss Foley complacently.

"Now, if you'll only not be offended, Miss Myra," resumed Wilhelmina, "I have brought my plaid dress and cape. I have worked all the morning to let it down, and it must be nearly long enough for you. Also my gray straw hat with the green feather. You see those horrid people will be looking for a young lady in black, and they'll never think it is you in colors, and grannie has put a few things in that may be useful; she hopes you'll excuse us."

"Excuse you!" cried Myra, holding out her hand for Willy's. "I can never thank you enough for your thoughtful kindness."

"Now, Miss Dallas—I mean Miss Smith, for we had better keep up the make-believe—I *have* a little bit of shopping to do as I *am* in town, so I'll leave you and Willy here together. I'll come back by five; we will have a cup of tea, and take the 6.10 to Redworth."

A little more talk respecting their arrangements, and Myra's new friend set forth on her shopping. A delightful hour—to Wilhelmina, at least—ensued, spent in arraying Myra in the former's dress, hat, etc. This wrought such a complete change that Willy clapped her hands, and screamed with triumph at the metamorphosis.

"If you only keep your veil down not a creature would know you," she exclaimed. "Now we'll pack your things, and have everything ready by the time Miss Foley comes back. There is another sister, a good bit younger, but she does not look it. She is so funny. This one is head man. Miss Letitia is like a child; she reads novels from morning till night, and I think she is writing a book herself; but she is *that* good-natured. Won't she be delighted to have you hiding there? It's a very nice house, and such lots and lots of books and papers, and people are always changing books (they have a circulating library), or buying books or papers, or—no end of things; market day the place is quite crowded," etc., etc.—and Wilhelmina rattled on while Myra thought earnestly of the advisability of writing to her aunt.

"Yes," she exclaimed suddenly, "I will do it."

"What?" exclaimed Wilhelmina.

"I must send a few lines to Mrs. Dallas; if she ever cared even a little bit for me, she will be terribly anxious; but I will leave the letter open for your mother to read, and if she does not forbid it, will you post it for me?"

"All right; but, Miss Myra, I'll do better than post it. I will go down in the dusk and slip it into the letter-box, so there needn't be any postmark to put that woman on your track. She will think you are staying in town."

Myra therefore wrote a few lines assuring Mrs. Dallas that she was safe and well, that she was grateful to her for

all her kindness, but that in future she wished to earn her own bread.

These occupations filled the time till Miss Foley returned, later than she had promised, so Myra was carried away with something of hurry, that completed her nervous trepidation at finding herself in the streets under such circumstances and in such strange guise, as it seemed to her when she caught a glimpse of herself in the glass.

It was, indeed, a terrible transformation those flashy garments of Wilhelmina's made. "I suppose I may change them when I am away from London," was her comforting reflection, as she bade the owner an affectionate good-by before leaving the hotel, as it was considered imprudent that she should accompany the travelers to the station.

Myra felt, indeed, alone and afloat when she found herself steaming northwest with a stranger into the unknown.

Fortunately Miss Foley had a strong, kindly, cheerful face, with an expression which reminded the young refugee of her dear, good friend, Mrs. Keene. Myra liked her looks, and gazed at her steadily while she read the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and finally grew calm enough to peruse the *Lady's Pictorial*, with which her new protectress provided her. The carriage was nearly full, so our travelers kept silence, but Myra was interested in watching the rich woodland country through which they were flying.

Redworth was a quaint old town, once renowned for its society, when in the old coaching times it was a long day's journey from the metropolis. It was still a good hunting center, and the existence of a large, well known boys' school secured it from desertion and stagnation.

Its gabled, red-roofed houses, the beautiful ruins of an ancient abbey, and a pretty race course, on which some of the older houses almost touched, were sources of justifiable pride to its citizens. It was surrounded by a number of gentlemen's seats—not great palatial abodes, but comparatively small and within the reach of the smaller gentilities who dwelt in and just outside the town, attracted by moderate rents and educational advantages. It was in many ways a desirable residence, and held its own against the centralizing tendencies of modern days.

It was eight o'clock before Miss Foley and her charge reached their destination. The station was outside the

town at some little distance, and Miss Foley at once secured a fly from among the vehicles which usually awaited the arrival of the fast evening train from London.

"It's as well not to be shut in face to face with a lot of people in a 'bus,'" said Miss Foley. "Now, my dear Miss Dallas—I mean Miss Smith—you'll find us very homely—just business people—but we'll do our very best for you and make you as comfortable as we can. Don't you be surprised at any little story I may tell about you to my sister when we first go in. I hadn't time to let her know you were coming, so I must account for you in some way."

"Very well," said Myra submissively.

Then Miss Foley exclaimed at intervals :

"There—look to your right. That's our beautiful ruin—the old abbey. There's quite a nice view of it from our back windows. That's St. Olave's Church. The rector gives us splendid sermons on Sunday evenings in summer. They say it is over five hundred years old. There—that's the cross—the town cross. Some say it's an Eleanor Cross, more say it aint," etc., etc.

"It is a delightful, picturesque place," said Myra, with hearty admiration.

Soon the fly stopped before a wide-fronted, low windowed shop about midway up the High Street, where prints, books, toy easels, ink bottles, requisites for the writing table, and such-like wares of a higher class bookseller and stationer's shop, were set forth.

A small door admitted to the private part of the house, which was quickly opened by a solemn, elderly servant, in a large old-fashioned cap and apron, both beautifully white.

"You're late, ma'am," she said, looking with some surprise at Myra. "Miss Letitia was growing anxious."

Here a small, slight woman came round a turn in the passage. She was dressed in gray, and wore a white lace fichu over her shoulders and crossed in front; a wide black sash was tied at one side in long bows and ends; her light, dull hair, which was mixed with gray and worn in a crop, curled in short, flat curls over her forehead. She had faded eyes and a small, weak mouth; while a very yellow, pale complexion suggested indigestion or indifferent health.

"Dear—dear Harriet," she said in a sweet small voice, "I was growing quite uneasy about you,"

"Oh, I always take care of myself, dear. You see, I have brought a visitor. Miss Smith—this is my sister, Letitia. I was introduced to Miss Smith to-day; and as she is anxious to acquaint herself with the bookselling business, with a view to taking Miss Wilson's place when she marries, I persuaded her to come with me."

This was said in an audible tone, and listened to with avidity by the servant.

"Oh, indeed. You are always prompt, sister. I am sure I am very glad to see Miss Smith. Pray, walk in—you'll want something after your journey. It is a little dark here—mind the two steps down. I'll just go on and open the door."

She went quickly and opened a door, from which the light came strongly, showing four or five steps, which led up to it.

"Take that little portmanteau to Mrs. Keene's room, Keziah," said Miss Foley, "and make up the bed. Miss Smith will stay with us for a little while. Come along, Miss Smith. This is our sitting room, and we are a little proud of the look-out—not every town house can boast one so good."

The room in which Myra found herself was of fair dimensions and comfortably, though very simply furnished. It had two windows, which looked on a neatly kept garden, ending in an ivy-covered wall, beyond which the race course stretched its green space, to the left of which the graceful arches and traceried windows of the ruined abbey could be seen.

"It is charming, indeed," exclaimed Myra, whose spirits had risen in proportion to her distance from London.

It was a lovely summer evening; the room faced the west, and the sky was still flaming with the crimson and violet and golden glories of the sunset, against which every line and curve of the ruins stood out softly clear. The slight breeze which so often springs up at sundown, came, laden with dewy freshness, across the grassy expanse, while the sweet quiet of earth and sky was emphasized by the solemn tolling of the curfew from the tower of St. Olave's.

"How sweet—how delightful!" continued Myra, leaning from the window. "It must be good to live here."

"London people are always pleased with our old town,"

said Miss Letitia with a gratified simper. "I suppose you have lived chiefly in London?"

"Yes—latterly," returned Myra. There was a little hesitation in her manner.

"Ask no more at present, sister," said Miss Foley with some solemnity. "When we are alone I shall have much to tell you respecting Miss Smith, which will interest you deeply and make you still more ready to welcome her."

"Oh, indeed. Dear, dear! I am all curiosity," exclaimed Letitia. "But what will you take? You must be famished."

"We will wait for supper, which will be ready as usual, I suppose, at nine."

"Just so, Harriet; and maybe Miss Smith will come to my room to take off her things."

There was something in the quiet, refined homeliness of this humble *bourgeois* establishment that soothed and comforted our young waif, and gave her a sense of security, of confidence, of which the last six months of her life had been singularly denuded.

The little supper table was well furnished and neatly spread, while the conversation, if not brilliant, was sensible and sincere. Miss Wilson—the assistant, for whose post Myra was supposed to be an aspirant—was a plain, sandy-haired young woman with spectacles; and on being told the reason of Myra's sudden appearance, showed much interest in her, and put some leading questions, of a somewhat embarrassing description, as to her previous training, whether she had ever been "out" before, or if she had attempted any other line of business. Miss Foley, however, was quite equal to the occasion, and nipped all unwise curiosity in the bud.

Finally, it was very delightful to go to bed in the neat, exquisitely clean chamber allotted to her, where the sheets smelt of lavender, and the roses and clematis which clothed the back of the house peeped in at the window, while the profound stillness was only broken by the chiming of quarters and half-hours by the deep, musically toned clock.

How delicious it was to feel sleep creeping over her, and a sort of hope that here she might find rest, occupation, perhaps humble independence; so, softly and graciously, life

and its grim realities faded temporarily away, and balmy sleep settled down upon her weary senses.

The first glance at Miss Letitia's face next morning told Myra that the whole of her story had been revealed to the sympathetic spinster. She looked at their young guest with almost awed admiration, and ministered to her with delighted alacrity.

As, in the natural division of labor at "Foley's Library," a good deal of housekeeping and very little shopkeeping fell to Miss Letitia's lot, she felt free to lionize Myra about the old town, and enjoyed the idea of introducing her to its beauties and peculiarities, feeling very keenly that sense of ownership in their abode which is peculiar to the inhabitants of small places.

At first, however, Myra was nervous and averse to venturing out, nor did she like to go into the shop nor the sort of reading room over it, where the magazines and newspapers lay on a large table and another assistant presided over the library department.

A few days of unbroken quiet and the assurance of Miss Foley revived Myra's courage, while the natural desire to look about urged her to explore a new place.

"I suppose I may wear my own dress now?" she asked. "I have grown accustomed to black, and do not like myself in colors."

"Not in those colors, I should think," said Miss Foley, with a sniff. "Wilhelmina likes to make a peacock of herself, and has that opinion of her own taste, she wouldn't listen to any suggestion. You put on your own clothes, my dear; you are safe enough here."

"I do not want to wear out Wilhelmina's things. I might get an everyday frock for myself," continued Myra, smiling at the joyful idea of having a little money to do what she liked with, "for I should like really to go into the shop and be your assistant. I know I am stupid about some things, but I would try hard to learn."

Myra knew nothing about aristocratic prejudices; to be happy and independent was all she asked for; yet the greatest lady in the land could not shrink with greater horror from vulgarity and ugliness than she did.

"My dear young lady, I hope there is a brighter future before you than that."

"Why? I could be very happy here. Pray let me try to learn your business."

So Myra made herself quite at home, and brought an unusual element of sweetness and light into the somewhat monotonous existence of her kind protectors.

When Miss Letitia found that "Miss Smith" could draw—nay, more—when she had made some sketches of the priory ruins, outside and inside, her pride and pleasure knew no bounds. Miss Foley had them framed, ticketed at a moderate price, and placed prominently in her window.

"They are just like the old place," she said, "and I shouldn't wonder if they went off well."

"I will take 'Miss Smith' to Wickham Woods to-morrow," said Miss Letitia. "It is just lovely along the river and the old bridge. It isn't more than a mile to the woods, and then there are always logs lying about we can sit down on. People are not generally allowed through, but the game-keeper's wife at the lodge knows me, and will let us in. It makes it all the safer. Captain Forrester, the Squire of Wickham, is very particular, but he is not a bad landlord. Ah, his father used to keep the place alive in the old times."

To Myra, Wickham Woods was a terrestrial Paradise, abounding in delicious "bits," and she made many studies there, sometimes with Letitia and occasionally without her. So absorbing was this occupation that she began to forget her fear of detectives, her dread of being dragged back to Mrs. Dallas and Lionel. Indeed, Miss Foley expressed her doubts that any aunt could keep her against her will.

Meanwhile, with a curious reluctance, Myra made up her mind to write to Leyton at his lodgings. She did not like to trouble him; she dreaded falling, through him, into the claws of Dorothea; and finally, she was foolishly ashamed of having torn up his letter without noting the address he gave her.

There was an unusual mixture of child and woman in Myra; to a certain point she had the courage of her opinions, but beside this stronger line ran a fainter parallel, which made her shrink from the rebukes or disapprobation of those she loved. Still, it might seem cold and indifferent if she did *not* write to Jack; so in the shortest, simplest manner she told him that she had fled from—she scarce knew what, for she had been well and kindly treated, but

she wanted to be independent, to work for herself. Then she begged him not to trouble about her, as she was safe and well.

This missive the post, with its swift punctuality, carried to Leyton's remote quarters in the northwest; and there it lay, for he had asked his chum, Ardill, to look in and forward his letters, as he distrusted his landlady's accuracy and caligraphy. Now Ardill himself went out of town, and as Jack's letters were few and far between—save those on business, which were addressed to the studio—he omitted to call for a few days after his return.

Meantime Leyton found Paris more interesting than ever after a long absence, and there was persuaded by a friend to run down with him to have a look at the famous cathedral at Chartres; altogether he was away more than a month.

Mrs. Keene kept Myra informed of how things went at the hotel. Within a week after his arrival the guest of whom she was so suspicious took his departure; and Mrs. Keene had the courage to call on Mrs. Dallas with the intention of asking if she had news of Miss Myra. But Mrs. Dallas was in her room, and suffering too severely from nervous exhaustion to see anyone. Mrs. Dwyer, however, who came up to speak with her, gave a good deal of information.

"She is real bad," said the landlady; "she can get no tidings of the poor young lady. It's very curious, for she has put advertisements in the papers, and set detectives after, and what not! As for young Ashby, he has gone off abroad; whether to look for Miss Dallas or for change of air, I don't know. He looked bad enough for anything. It's a curious business, ma'am, as ever I knew—and you won't stop and have a cup of tea? Well, I'm sure the poor young lady has my best wishes, if *that* will do her any good."

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND.

It was a beautiful May that year, and London was looking its very best. The windows and balconies in the more fashionable quarters were full of flowers, and the roll of carriages ceased not by day nor by night.

Dinner engagements crowded on Mr. Wardlaw, from which he was able to make a selection, and sharpen his wits by contact with all that was choicest and brightest in his immediate world. He was sitting at breakfast one soft, sunny morning in his comfortable apartments, and opposite to him sat Cecil Forrester, who was up in town for a few days.

Forrester had not yet found either a house or a "flat" to suit him. Indeed, for the present, he was greatly in love with his country life, and interested in his improvements. He had dropped into breakfast with his ex-guardian, as it was the most likely time to find him at home and disengaged.

"Take some more strawberries?" Wardlaw was saying. "Breakfast is far and away the best time to eat fruit. You seem to be going ahead considerably down at Wickham; it will be a charming place in a year or two."

"Yes, I flatter myself it will; but the workmen are deuced slow and——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the servant with a card. Wardlaw glanced at it.

"Leyton, by Jove!" he exclaimed; then to the servant with animation, "Show him in at once." He rose and advanced to the door as Leyton, looking fresh and brown, came in.

"Delighted to see you, my dear boy! When did you come back?"

"I arrived about an hour ago, and thought I might venture to call at this ungodly hour, before I went off due

north to my own diggings, as I want to hear what is going on. Captain Forrester, this is an unexpected pleasure!" and they shook hands.

"Sit down, and have some breakfast," continued Wardlaw.

"Thank you, I have breakfasted."

"Well, I suppose you want to know how your show has been going on? I can tell you you have made a hit; the reviews have been most favorable."

"Yes, better than I expected. Most of them have been sent to me, and I have sold some of the pictures fairly well."

"You will be able to ask decent prices now." The conversation ran on in the same strain for some minutes, Forrester only throwing in monosyllables from time to time while he glanced at the paper. At last there was a pause, when Forrester, looking up, exclaimed, "What odd advertisements one finds in the second column. There's one, or rather, two here, which have appeared for three or four days, and excite my curiosity considerably: 'Missing since the 8th instant, a young lady, supposed to be acting under mental excitement. She is above middle height, slight in figure, and about nineteen years of age; blue eyes, auburn hair, and a small mole on left of chin; dressed in mourning, and wearing black straw hat, trimmed with black lace and ribbon. Any information which may lead to her discovery and restoration to her friends will be handsomely rewarded. Address, W. B., Dempster's Private Inquiry Office.'"

"That's rather an ordinary kind of thing!" remarked Leyton carelessly, though he had listened attentively enough.

"The other is more remarkable," continued Forrester. "'The young lady who asked a gentleman what o'clock it was, in a hansom, near Kensington Station, about a fortnight ago, is earnestly requested to send her address to G. D., Box No. 352, *Times* Office, as she may hear something to her advantage.' Now I wonder if these have anything to do with each other?"

"Impossible to say," put in Leyton.

"I am not so sure," returned Forrester. "The fact is, I believe I have met this blue-eyed young lady rambling about my own woods."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Wardlaw with some eagerness.

Tell me about the *reencounter*, I will tell you after why I want to know."

"Well," began Forrester, "I was walking through that part of the woods down by the stream which runs through them, not far from the gate on the Redworth road, when I came upon a young lady who had been sketching. Her drawing things were on the ground, and she had risen from a camp-stool to speak with a rascally-looking tramp, who was stretching out his hand in a threatening manner. Of course, I came up pretty quick, and asked him how he dared to trespass on my grounds, and why he was molesting the lady.

"'He will not believe that I have no money,' she said quietly enough, but there was an air of restrained fear about her. 'I only had twopence, and I gave it to him; but he was not satisfied.' While she spoke the tramp fled. I didn't follow him, he was too far before I noticed he was gone; so I expressed my regret that the fair artist should have been disturbed on my territory. She looked at me very straight. I never saw a girl give so steady a glance, and yet the eyes were soft enough. 'Then you are Captain Forrester?' she asked. I acknowledged my identity, whereupon she said she feared she was a trespasser, too. I told her she was, for no right of way existed through that part of the woods. You know, I can't make smooth speeches to women, that's the reason they bore me. I don't dislike them, of course, but they are a nuisance. However, I felt I must be civil to this girl; she was not exactly pretty, but nice and elegant-looking; so I added that *she* might come through as much as she liked, and I helped her to pick up her traps, and looked at the drawing. It seemed to me that it was uncommonly good. Of course, I am no great judge, but it was exactly like the place, with a glimpse of an old wooden bridge. It's very near the place I wanted *you* to paint, Leyton."

"Yes, yes—go on," said Leyton impatiently.

"I got very curious, and asked her if she knew the country. No; she was staying in the neighborhood for the first time. So I jumped to the conclusion that she was staying with the Warrens of Combe—they have writers and artists and all those sort of people staying there. I asked if she came from Combe. She laughed pleasantly and said:

“‘Oh, no; I am with Miss Foley. I am, I think, going to be her assistant.’

“‘I could not help saying, ‘The deuce you are,’ for she was quite a lady. Then she said she was much obliged to me, and bade me good-morning. However, I offered to walk back with her, as the tramp might turn up again. She accepted simply, as if it were quite the most natural thing in the world. I never felt so much at home and comfortable with a girl before. We had quite a nice walk and talk. She said she was so sorry she had been frightened, for she had not finished her sketch, and she did not think she could go there again. I offered to meet her any time she liked and mount guard. She took it all naturally, and made no bother. She said that if a Miss Letitia could come with her she need not trouble me; so I suggested that she might come with or without Miss Letitia, and I should be there about three o’clock. We parted just outside the town; for those infernal gossips would have raised no end of a dust if the Squire of Wickham had been seen with the bookseller’s assistant.”

“Well,” ejaculated Wardlaw, “and the next day?”

“She was there, sure enough, with a funny old soul, whom I remember all my life—one of a brace of sisters that kept the library in Redworth—and she was drawing away like fun. I did not stay long, but I got some hints out of the old one. Miss Smith was a charming artist. She had made a lovely picture of the ruins, which was framed and in the shop window; so I asked if the present production was for sale, and felt like a bashful idiot until she (Miss Smith) said straight out, as coolly as possible:

“‘I should be very glad, if you think it worth buying.’

“So I said I would; but we were in a difficulty about the price. I did not know what to offer, and she did not know what to ask; so we agreed that I was to show it to an artist friend of mine—yourself, Leyton. I saw the other sketches in the shop window. I’d like to bid for the whole lot; but we’ll settle that when you come down. Then we had a little more talk; and she bade me good-morning in a sweet, quiet way. But I don’t think any fellow would have stayed after she dismissed him. I never fancied any girl so much—there is something so tranquil and friendly about her. Now, I can’t help thinking that she is

the missing young lady," tapping the paper; "but her brains are right as a trivet—never met a more collected damsel."

Leyton grew more and more uneasy as Forrester proceeded.

"I, too, seem to recognize the lady, only it could not be——" he said.

"And I believe *I* have the key to the riddle," observed Wardlaw. "Here is my tale."

He then related the story already told by Myra—of her insisting on sharing the hansom engaged by a gentleman—to which Forrester and Leyton gave ear with much surprise.

"So," he concluded, "we parted at Oxford Circus. She went away east, and I saw her no more; but I have felt uncomfortable about her ever since—she was so young, so resolute, yet so frightened. As soon as I saw that advertisement, I put in the other. I fancied she was inclined to put some faith in my gray hairs; but it has been out for more than a week, and no notice has been taken. Now I know who it is."

"Who?" exclaimed both the other men together.

"Why, that niece of poor Edward Dallas, who it seems, has taken fright at God knows what and run away. She has been missing since the 8th of May—that was the date on which my young friend took possession of my cab and myself. For that matter, I fell in with her just at the corner of Melford Road, where Mrs. Dallas lives; and when Lady Shirland told me of the flight, I discussed with myself whether I should give information or not. Somehow I could not bring myself to betray the poor child; so I put in that appeal, hoping to attract her attention and offer myself as an intermediary."

"Myra Dallas run away! My God! what has become of her?" cried Leyton, greatly disturbed.

"If she is the girl I met in the woods, she seems safe and sound, and all right," said Forrester.

"And if she is, she ought to be something like your second cousin once removed, Forrester, if her parents had not omitted a certain ceremony."

"No, really? How awkward! She is, then, I suppose, that daughter of Fred Dallas who was adopted by the Colonel's widow."

"But how can she have managed? She hadn't a farthing—not even a postage stamp," cried Leyton.

"Then the sooner I buy those drawings the better," remarked Forrester.

"Of course, we cannot be sure that your young artist *is* Miss Dallas," put in Wardlaw.

"I fancy she is. But what can have frightened her out of the aunt's house? It must have been the confounded on!" exclaimed Leyton.

"I cannot understand the woman," said Wardlaw thoughtfully.

"No, nor I," returned Leyton, taking his hat. "But I shall soon find some clew to Myra, poor child! I can't stand the notion of her wandering about penniless and forlorn."

"Where are you off to?" exclaimed Wardlaw.

"To see a woman who will be sure to know something of her."

"And she hasn't any money at all?" asked Forrester. "Hadn't her father any?"

"If he had, and did not will it to his daughter, of course all would have been his brother's. But I must be off."

"Let us know the result of your inquiries," cried Wardlaw, as he left the room.

"It is a bad business, her having no money," said Forrester when he was alone with his ex-guardian.

"Deuced bad," replied Wardlaw.

"It can be remedied."

"No doubt it can," said Wardlaw shortly.

"I'll talk to you about it when Leyton discovers where he is," was Forrester's conclusion; and they turned to other subjects, occasionally reverting to the curious disappearance of Myra, an event which made a deep impression on both.

Leaving the house, Leyton walked swiftly toward Belgrave Road, looking eagerly for a cab, when, to his surprise and annoyance, a brougham from which a lady was alighting and shaking her hand suddenly drew up beside the pavement in front of him, and he recognized Dorothea Browne.

"Oh, Mr. Leyton, I had no idea you had come back, and it's so curious happening to meet you at this hour. I am

going to spend the day at Richmond with the De Courcy Joneses; that is the reason I am going out so early. We are busy rehearsing a pastoral play that is to astonish everyone. I am so glad your exhibition has been such a success."

"Thank you very much. But I am in a tremendous hurry, and there does not seem to be a cab about."

"Oh, come in, I will drive you as far as Piccadilly; you will find plenty there."

Hoping to save time, Leyton jumped in.

"I suppose you have heard of all the trouble poor Mrs. Dallas has had," resumed Dorothea. "She has been almost out of her mind. That ungrateful creature, Myra, has run away, and no one can find her."

"Wardlaw has just mentioned it to me," returned Leyton guardedly.

"Yes, it must be quite three weeks ago that poor Mrs. Dallas came to us in a fearful state of agitation. It seems she had a scene with poor Lionel Ashby, whom she refused in the most unexpected manner, after encouraging him—nay, more than encouraging him; and then without rhyme or reason, she fled. Someone must have arranged a plan for her. She is either insane, or has found a lover she prefers to Lionel. Mrs. Dallas, who is always charitable, thinks she is insane."

"That remains to be proved, Miss Browne. We must first hear what Myra has to say."

"Oh, Myra! Yes, to be sure. You were old friends. But do you think you will be able to find her?"

"I'll try."

"Are you sure you do not know where she is?"—with playful malice.

"Miss Browne"—indignantly—"what do you think me capable of?"

"Oh, pray forgive me if I have made a mistake; I am so thoughtless. You must not be angry. I suppose you will be in town now till the end of the season. We have a musical party on the twenty-fourth; I hope you will come. I think we have sent you a card."

"Thank you a thousand times; I'll be sure to come, and I'll not take you any farther out of your way. Hi, hansom!" He pulled the check string, and was standing on

the pavement and raising his hat before she could say good-by.

"Ill-natured, elderly kitten," thought Leyton, as he sped northeast. "It is *impossible* Myra could have a lover—yet why not? Lovers are very irrepressible atoms, and Myra is a sort of girl that—No, she has fled from, not *to*, a lover. That young ducky is a presumptuous hound; I'd like to have the thrashing of him. My God! what a position for a tender, delicate girl to be placed in! Mrs. Keene will know something about her. Mrs. Keene is a trump! It is most extraordinary that she has evaded detection for more than three weeks; someone must have helped her. Why, why did she not write to me? Her avoidance of me looks rather as if there *was* a lover at the bottom of it, yet there is no reason she should not have consulted me respecting him also."

So Leyton tormented himself till he reached Gilbert Street.

"Mrs. Keene was at home, and would be with Mr. Leyton immediately."

He paced the comfortable parlor with devouring impatience, till the door opened and Mrs. Keene came forward with almost juvenile rapidity. She held out a fat hand exclaiming, with great earnestness, "Thank God! Oh, thank God! you have come at last, sir!" and dropped into a chair.

The advertisements which gave rise to this conversation had soon attracted the attention of Miss Letitia, who quickly carried it to Myra, and they discussed the matter with much nervous excitement.

To be publicly advertised seemed to be the most appalling crisis. Myra felt she could not move outside the house without attracting immediate detection; that the universal finger of scorn would be pointed at the girl who ran away, and was pilloried in the public prints. When, however, Wardlaw's appeal appeared, she, Myra, was deeply interested.

"It must be that nice, kind gentleman who let me go with him in the cab," she said; "*I should* like to write and thank him, and say I am safe and well. He seemed to think I was going to do something very dreadful."

When, however, Miss Foley came to give her opinion, she soothed Myra's fears considerably.

"In the first place, my dear Miss Myra, very few people here read the *Times*. The local paper is enough for most of them, and those that do don't look at the advertisements. Moreover, if they did, they would never dream of any missing young lady venturing into the country. It would not be a bad plan to put a colored flower or feather in your hat; it would take off the *mourningfied* look. You just go out with Letitia, and draw as usual. No one will ever think about you."

Ultimately Miss Foley's counsels prevailed. Myra added a pretty bow of pale blue ribbon to her hat, and tied another round her throat, which quite took off from the mourning aspect of her costume.

Her *rencontre* with Forrester was a source of some excitement to Miss Letitia, who was disposed to see a budding romance in any casual meeting between two unmarried people. But Myra was quite prosaic on the subject; she was very pleased with Forrester, it is true, but chiefly because he promised to be a purchaser of her sketches.

Though this stay in Miss Foley's peaceful, comfortable home was, indeed, a breathing space and a refreshment to Myra, she could not refrain from speculating as to the cause of Leyton's silence. He had been so kind, so interested in her rather unpromising future, that she wondered he did not write to advise her, at least. She did not reckon on his not having received her letter. Of course, she did not expect him to give her much of his valuable time, but a few minutes—enough for a letter—she did expect, and, in truth felt a good deal wounded by his silence. When alone she used to drop her pen, her pencil, her needle—whatever occupied her fingers, and think of the old happy days while she was still a child, and wonder why it had been her fate to be so destitute of all ordinary ties, to ask herself if she could ever be forced back to live with Mrs. Dallas and Lionel.

But Myra was no morbid mourner of the inevitable. She made herself pleasant and useful to her kind hosts, and applied herself diligently to learn something of their business, though the sisters smiled at the notion of her being their assistant. At present, indeed, Myra did not like

to venture into the shop, but she quite looked forward to taking her place there. This stay at Redworth was the first taste of home she had had since her father was taken from her, and it was "as rain unto a thirsty land."

The morning after Leyton had heard of Myra's flight was overcast and showery, so she sat at home in the pleasant drawing room busily engaged in making a copy of the sketch she had taken in the old Priory, for which Miss Foley foretold a large demand. She was absorbed in her occupation when Keziah, the old servant, opened the door, and said solemnly. "A gentleman wants to speak to you, miss."

"A gentleman? what sort of a gentleman?" cried Myra, starting up in wild affright. "Do not let anyone come in."

"Is there no admittance for me, Myra?" said a delightfully familiar voice, as Leyton passed Keziah and entered the room.

"Oh, Jack—dear Jack, how good of you to come!" cried Myra, flying to him with outstretched hands, which he held kindly for a moment or two.

"What can you have thought of me?" he exclaimed. "Do you know, I never had your letter till yesterday evening, when I arrived from Paris. The idiots at my rooms never sent it on. And you didn't believe I should desert you, Myra?"

"Oh, no. I never thought you meant to be unkind; but I had no business to worry you, or right to suppose you would trouble about me. Oh, I am so glad to see you! How did you find me out?"

"Through Mrs. Keene, of course; but I heard of your flight by accident. I'll tell you all about it later."

They sat down, Myra's usually pale cheeks delicately flushed with pleasure, her eyes sparkling with undisguised joy.

She could not tell—indeed, she never dreamed of trying to analyze her own emotions—why it was that the sound of Leyton's voice, the glance of his eyes, the touch of his hand, filled her heart with life and strength and courage; but it was so. The whole world was changed since he had come.

"You seem a new creature, Myra," said Leyton, looking

at her with grave inspection. "There is color in your cheeks and light in your eyes."

"That is partly because I am so glad to see you," she returned, meeting his eyes with frank, happy composure. "But I do feel better here. The sense of being free, of going where I like, is so delicious; though I am always afraid I am very ungrateful to Mrs. Dallas."

"Come, Myra, tell me the whole story. What put you up to run away? The last time I saw you, you looked like a spiritless 'bird in the snare of the fowler.'"

"I felt like it," said Myra, with a thoughtful smile; and she went on to relate her escape and adventures.

Leyton listened with deep attention. At the end he thought for a moment; then, leaning forward, he looked gravely into her eyes, and asked:

"What was the immediate cause of your flight? You have not told me quite all, Myra."

"No; not quite. But I promised Mrs. Dwyer never to tell something which she repeated to me. If she would agree to my telling you, I would at once."

"Very well, Myra. I dare say we could get her permission. I shall ask her some day. You were really very prompt and plucky about your escape; but it was energy thrown away. You might have walked out of your aunt's house, and she could not have prevented you."

"Is that really true, Jack?"

"It is indeed."

"But I never could have done so. I could *run* away; I could not have *walked* away. Oh! when I found Lionel Ashby was running after me, I felt wild with terror—I dreaded him so much."

"Why?" asked Leyton, a smile twinkling in his brown eyes. "Because the poor beggar was in love with you?"

"It was rather stupid of me, I suppose. I ought, perhaps, to have been grateful to him; but it is strange how I always feared his hatred. Though he talked of love, I always felt he hated me too."

She shuddered as she spoke.

"You describe the devil's own mixture," said Leyton. "Now, Myra," he recommenced after a short pause, "you must not hide any more. You must write to your aunt—a nice, amiable letter, you know; say you were so distressed

at causing discomfort about her son—anything you like; that you felt better to leave her, and that you had not the courage to do so openly. Express your wish to be on friendly terms, but be very decided about leading an independent life.”

“Very well, Jack. I now feel how foolish I have been, and am so ashamed of the trouble I have given.”

“It was not an unnatural mistake; but I want you to be clear of Mrs. Dallas. I don’t like the tone of her advertisement. By the way, what can you do when you break with Mrs. Dallas?”

“I hope Miss Foley will keep me as her assistant. I am not clever about such things, but I will be careful.”

“My God! what an extraordinary turn of fate, that you should be here assistant in a petty shop while your cousin should be the squire—lord of the manor—within a stone’s throw. No, Myra; this will not do.”

“And why not? These kind people like me; I may be as a daughter to them; and as I am quite, quite alone, and belong to no one, I am fortunate to find such a home and to maintain myself without troubling anyone. Let me stay here, Jack—I am very glad to be at rest.”

“My dear Myra,” cried Leyton, inexpressibly touched, “I have no right to interfere with you; but it is too soon to talk of plans. You must lose no time in putting yourself right with Mrs. Dallas. Afterward we shall see. So you have been drawing,” coming over to the table and looking at her work. “That is nice—very nice, indeed.”

“There are delightful places all about for sketching. I have done some trees and a bridge; and, do you know Captain Forrester was so nice; he found me trespassing on his ground, and told me I might come whenever I pleased; and he is going to buy my drawings, Jack, only he wants to ask some artist friend what they are worth. Perhaps *you* are that friend.”

“Very likely. We will make him pay through the nose. Now, Myra, go and write your letter; and may I read it, for I want you to be very careful.”

This important undertaking occupied some time, and though on the whole Myra followed Leyton’s advice, she insisted on putting in some passages he thought unnecessary.

"You are rather deceptive, Myra," he exclaimed, when their task was at last accomplished. "You seem as soft as wax or snow, and yet you can assert yourself in the most amazing manner."

"You don't think me obstinate?"

"I think you everything that is good and sweet."

Myra laughed merrily at this unstinted praise, but somehow her laughter did not please Leyton. Had he made himself ridiculous?

"Now I must see your good friends here, as you wish it. I ought, you know."

So Miss Foley and Miss Letitia were asked to come to the drawing room, and heard Leyton's views with deep interest and a certain amount of deference.

"I am *that* glad," exclaimed the elder sister, "to think there is to be no more skulking and hiding; and you may be sure, sir, Miss Dallas is heartily welcome as long as ever she needs to stay. We'll miss her sorely when she does go."

"Not more than she'll miss you," returned Leyton. "Now, Myra, I am going to have a day in the country and not return till to-morrow morning. Suppose you come and show me those famous woods. I was to have painted a picture for Forrester to match the 'Autumn Morning' you liked so much. I have never had time to attempt it; let us choose the scene to-day." Could my weak pen describe the charm of that walk? No; nor could all the pens of all the poets fully convey the subtle joy, the magic rhythm of sympathy, of heavenly harmony, between two hearts on which was dawning the sense of each other's beauty and incomparable fitness.

CHAPTER XX.

PATCHWORK.

MRS. DALLAS had had her share of disappointment and mortification, chiefly owing to her uneasy ambition, her restless desire to win a high social position, to accomplish which she needed a much larger fortune than she possessed. It was this which gave such bitterness to the tantalizing circumstances of her husband's death only a few days before that of his wealthy uncle.

But nothing she had hitherto experienced at all approached the cruel defeat she had sustained at the hands of an insignificant girl, whose character, whose intelligence even, she despised—a penniless dependent, whom she could *not* dominate, and who mocked her skill, her experience, by a clever, daring, successful escape.

Was Myra deeper than herself? Had she accomplices outside whose existence she had contrived to conceal from her benefactress? Nothing could convince her (Mrs. Dallas) that Mrs. Keene was not the chief agent in Myra's flight, and her fury with the detective set to watch her, when he failed, was none the less intense because of the careful suppression of its indications. He was contemptuously dismissed when he declared he could find no trace of any communication with the fugitive; that he could pump no information from the servants, nor perceive the smallest sign of anything like concealment.

Myra's letter to her aunt, dropped into the letter-box without stamp or post-mark, induced her to believe the writer had never left London; and, indeed, London was the safest labyrinth in which to hide.

Still, as the passing days mounted to weeks, and no tidings of the missing girl reached her, Mrs. Dallas grew sick with baffled hatred and defeated strategy. Her only relief was scheming how she might prove Myra in some

measure insane, and acquire a legal right to her guardianship.

Her son's selfish desire to seek amusement or distraction abroad offended her deeply.

She was certainly fonder of him than of anyone or anything else; still, her affection was neither as true nor as deep as her friends believed. He had failed, too, to succeed—an unpardonable offense in her keen, hard eyes. Moreover, he cost her a great deal of money, to which she greatly objected.

She was really unwell. Her nerves were strained and racked by the impotence of her will; in short, her condition quite justified her in demanding her son's return from Paris. Their meeting was not very comforting to either. Mrs. Dallas spoke her mind very forcibly, accusing Lionel of weakness, extravagance, want of principle, mal-address, contemptible folly, etc., to which he replied with equal force and frankness. The explosion cleared the air somewhat, when both began to see that their interests were alike, and that only in union could they find strength.

On this slightly improved frame of mind, Myra's letter came like a thunderbolt.

Mother and son were sitting at their late breakfast. Lionel having no office to attend, and his mother not having been able to look for another appointment for him, he had a good deal of time on his hands. He lounged about all the morning, and went, she knew not where, all the afternoon and evening; for, rather to her dismay, he had money in his pocket which she had not given him, and respecting which he would give no information.

The nine o'clock postman was going his rounds before they had finished their meal, and the servant brought in several letters, at which Mrs. Dallas glanced, taking up one as the servant left the room.

"Myra's writing!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas in a low voice. "The postmark is Redworth. Where is Redworth?"

"I haven't an idea! Open it, can't you, mother?"

Mrs. Dallas obeyed, while Lionel came round to lean on the back of her chair, and read over her shoulder.

MY DEAR MRS. DALLAS [it began]—I have often wished to write to you fully, as I must seem very ungrateful, which I really am

not. But I wanted to understand my position first, as I was not sure about it.

For some time before I came away I felt it was impossible for me to remain dependent on your bounty, though, if you had permitted me to help myself, I might have been glad to stay with you. Above all, I was so deeply distressed at causing you and Lionel such annoyance, that I could not bear to stay under your roof.

I ought to have told you this, and gone away openly, but I was too great a coward. I feared I knew not what, thinking you might have the power to keep me. Now that I know you have *not*, I should like to come and see you, as I am not very far away, and assure you that I can never forget all you have done for me in the last five or six months. I think I can earn my own bread here without troubling anyone. But I *do* want you to forgive me, and be friends with me. I am always puzzled about Lionel, and why he wished me to marry him, when I really could not. But there will be plenty of nice girls ready enough to marry him, and he will soon forget me. I am staying with two kind ladies who keep a book shop, and they will, I think, keep me as their assistant when the present one goes. This place is about two hours from town by the Great Northern line. I hope you will believe that I am always sincerely and gratefully yours.

MYRA DALLAS.

Mother and son read this through in silence, and paused at the end. Then Lionel said with a sneer, "It will puzzle you to prove the writer of that letter a mad woman."

"Who has told her that I had no power to keep her? She implies that she knew it before, but she did not! You see, she says, 'I wanted to understand my position first,' before writing to me. Someone has told her, and it is quite true."

"Still, could we not carry out that capital plan of yours about insanity," cried Lionel. "Must we give her up? I feel as if I could clutch her in spite of all the devils in hell?"

"I don't know which are the stronger, but all the angels in heaven couldn't *give* her to you if the law was on her side," said his mother dryly. "Who has been informing that sentimental idiot of her rights? I feel, I know, it is Leyton. The moment I met his eyes I was conscious my enemy stood before me. He has some extraordinary interest in her. Surely there cannot be a second man as foolish as you are?"

"I do not know about that, but Leyton seemed to me hard and even elderly. Then Englishmen think so much about birth and family and——"

"In a *wife*, yes!" interrupted his mother cynically. "In other relations birth does not matter much. Remember this, Leyton is a thorough Bohemian, a man who cares little for conventional proprieties. I well remember the scandals about him some nine or ten years ago at Simla; he was quite young then, but——"

"Then he is by no means young now," interrupted Lionel in his turn. "But, mother, what *is* to be done. I feel half mad. Must we always grovel on moderate means? Is that delicious, infuriating creature to be kept from me? Could we not extract some of the spoil from——"

"No, Lionel, I tell you it is madness to think of it," cried Mrs. Dallas, interrupting him hastily. "You do not understand men of his order in England; indeed, it would be dangerous to meddle with any Europeans of the same class."

"I should fancy that one touch of necessity would make the whole world kin," he returned. "I fancy you exaggerate an Englishman's sense of honor."

"Not in some directions. Well, Lionel, I am afraid there is little or no chance of again drawing Myra into our trap; she seems to have her wits about her. However, we must not quarrel. I will accept the olive branch she holds out, and watch any opportunity for drawing the broken links together; we may do well yet. But her flight is altogether inexplicable, Lionel! Could she have had the faintest inkling of our Dijon plan?" and Mrs. Dallas grew somewhat pale, and her dark brows nearly met in a frown.

"Pooh—nonsense—impossible! We have never mentioned the matter save with closed doors—never written a line respecting it. None—absolutely none—save ourselves can know anything of our plan. If—if only she had not started off in that astounding way, all doubt and difficulty would have been at an end, *now*."

"I shall never reckon on anything again," said Mrs. Dallas. "Why did she object to you? What could she, a base-born beggar, expect? You were infinitely too good for her. But for her stupid, unappreciative obstinacy she would be your wife by this time, and all would have been well."

"It is too infernally provoking," ejaculated Lionel, throwing himself into a chair.

"It is. But, Lionel, extravagance will not mend matters;

and you are extravagant. You are perpetually going about in cabs; and you don't stay out half the night without spending money."

"Well, I haven't asked you for any since I came back from Paris."

"True; but that makes me all the more uneasy. I can guess where your present petty cash comes from; and though you have won a trifle to-day, you may plunge into ruin to-morrow."

"No; I shall not. I have a system—quite my own—which insures me success seven times out of every ten."

"I believe in no system, Lionel. If you gamble, you will die in a ditch—or the workhouse."

"Myra might have kept me from it, if you had got her for me."

"If you had got her for yourself, you mean," said his mother scornfully. "There—do not let us wrangle. Let me knit up this raveled mesh, if I can. It will be no easy task to answer this letter of Myra's. I shall have to see Lady Shirland and Miss Browne, and give it to them. I wish, Lionel, you would call there oftener. Be sure you keep up the character of a heart-broken lover, and pour in a steady stream of noble sentiments."

"That may do with Miss Dorothea; but it is no easy matter to throw dust in her ladyship's eyes."

"Perhaps not. I see some of these American shares are falling; so you must take a note to Keating, my stockbroker. I want to see him, and he must come to me. I shall write a note to Lady Shirland, asking for a few minutes' *tête-à-tête*. She has interested herself so much about Myra's disappearance, that I am bound to give her the news at once. Bring me back an answer. Meanwhile I will write to Myra."

As Lady Shirland's reply was a pressing invitation to luncheon, Mrs. Dallas postponed her letter to Myra, in order to make a careful and elaborate toilet.

She was received with open arms by her distinguished friends.

"So you have news for us of the stray lamb," cried Lady Shirland as soon as she had said, How do you do? "We will get rid of the servants as soon as we can, and have it all out."

"So sweet of you to come at once," murmured Dorothea. "I am dying to hear everything."

The butler and "Thomas" were pleased to be so soon dismissed to their own mid-day meal; and having insisted on filling her guest's glass once more, Lady Shirland composed herself to listen.

Mrs. Dallas began by reading out Myra's letter.

"My dear, someone has put her up to all that," was Lady Shirland's comment. "It is as clear as daylight—she has kept in hiding among her *bourgeois* friends for three or four weeks—and very cleverly she has hidden herself—because she didn't know, or was not sure, of your rights. Then someone or other tells her that you have no power to keep her against her will; so she writes that letter. I must say I think her conduct is unprincipled and ungrateful to a degree. I should have nothing more to do with her if I were you."

"Redworth!" repeated Miss Browne thoughtfully. "Isn't Captain Forrester's place near Redworth?"

"Yes; I believe it is," returned Lady Shirland. "What has that to do with it?"

"I don't know, mamma; but suppose they met and made friends, or became lovers?"

"Oh—pooh! Nonsense, Dorothea. Fancy Cecil Forrester thinking of a detrimental like Myra Dallas!"

"Highly improbable!" observed Mrs. Dallas. "But who can have told my runaway niece that she was free to go?"

"Any man who knew anything might," said Lady Shirland.

"I will tell you who did," cried Dorothea, clapping her hands together—"Jack Leyton. I met him the day before yesterday, quite early in the morning. He was in a great fuss about Myra, and said he was going to try and find her."

"I don't suppose he had far to seek," said Mrs. Dallas bitterly.

"I said the same thing to him, and he was awfully cross," returned Dorothea.

"I do not think he knew anything about it," added Lady Shirland. "I have always found Jack Leyton a truthful, honorable man. Why should he trouble about a little waif like Myra? Though I always maintain she is the making

of a charming woman, she isn't one *yet*—and she has no claim on him."

"He was very persevering in his efforts to see her while he was staying with me," said Mrs. Dallas. "I must say that I distrust him. I have no doubt now that *he* is the informant who suggested Myra's avowal of her whereabouts. But what, my dear Lady Shirland—what can have been her motive in flying from me? I can, indeed, say that I treated her as my own daughter. My poor boy was, perhaps, too ardent a lover; but at one time, I must say, she gave him every encouragement, and then, in the most inexplicable manner, turned against him. This is not the only case of changeableness I could bring against her. Indeed, at times I have doubted if her mental balance was perfect; there is such an odd strain of unreasonableness in her, as her act of leaving a happy, comfortable home proves."

"As to that, if all the unreasonable young ladies were considered insane, our lunatic asylums would be pretty full," said Lady Shirland dryly.

"And what would you advise me to do?" asked Mrs. Dallas plaintively.

"Leave her to herself; take no notice of her letter; she doesn't deserve anything more from you. I should go abroad and amuse myself if I were you; she seems quite ready to take her life into her own hands—let her," said Lady Shirland positively.

"No! dear friend, I cannot do that. The poor child may not be quite accountable. I would not be harsh with her. Then I must remember how dear she is to my beloved boy. No, no, dear Lady Shirland, we must not be implacable."

"I am sure you are an angel," cried Dorothea.

"My dear Mrs. Dallas, what reason have you for sticking to that girl through good and evil report?" asked Lady Shirland with a keen look at her guest.

"I hope you do not think me incapable of doing right for right's sake," said Mrs. Dallas, coloring and casting down her eyes.

"No, no, of course not! But I am a dreadful old pagan myself, and by no means addicted to do disinterested things, and I judge others accordingly. As to your son, it is just on his account that I should keep her out of the house *if*

you have any serious doubts of her sanity. However, I suppose you are the best judge of your own affairs. What do you intend to do, then?"

"Well, my impulse is to write and tell her the grief and anxiety her conduct has cost me, but offer to receive her once more, allowing her to draw, or teach, or do whatever she likes for her pocket money; that was, I know, one of her complaints, that I did not, in addition to supplying fully every possible want, give her a sum of money to dispose of as she liked. Now that would have been impossible, Lady Shirland. Her carelessness was absolutely like that of an idiot incapable of understanding the value of anything. Her poor uncle gave her a valuable ring; she threw it about anywhere. I do not know how often I picked it up and warned her. At last it disappeared altogether."

"Well, all I can say is, you are a better woman than I am, and more forgiving. But as to giving you advice, it is useless, for I see you are determined to take the silly girl back," said Lady Shirland rising.

"No, not determined. I shall consider the matter carefully."

"You had better, Mrs. Dallas, and don't mind what your son says—men in love are temporarily idiots. Now, can we set you down anywhere? the carriage is at the door."

The walk in Wickham Woods was successful as well as delightful. Leyton was greatly pleased with the views, and decided on a charming vista through an opening in a grove of fine beech and lime trees, with a clear, brown brook in the foreground, and a dim, blue undulating line of distant country beyond, for his "Spring Evening." How charming it was to discuss the various "points" of the subject.

Then with some ceremony, Miss Letitia invited Mr. Leyton to join their evening meal when he escorted Myra back. And very agreeable he made himself, talking in the simplest and most unaffected manner of various places and people he had visited; though in her appreciation of his diverting anecdotes and reminiscences, Miss Letitia declared he "talked like a book."

"I am going off early to-morrow," said Leyton as he stood up to take leave. "I have various matters to settle in town; but the end of next week I think of coming down

for a while to make studies for that picture, and catch the local color and character. As Forrester is not at home, I think I shall establish myself at The Plough; it seems clean and quiet. Then, Myra, I shall give you some lessons, if you will come and sketch with me."

"It will be perfectly enchanting!" cried Myra with frank pleasure.

"Mind, you must tell me what answer you have from Mrs. Dallas; and, Myra, I think you ought to write a nice note to Mr. Wardlaw—the gentleman who gave you a lift in his cab—send it to me, and I will give it to him."

"Very well; but I feel very much ashamed of having made so much ado about what was really nothing, only, you see, I did not know. But as I fear if I had not *run* away I should never have *walked* away."

"No doubt; there are many like you, Myra. When I come back I shall discuss future plans. Good-by."

A hearty shake of the hand, and he was gone. After a little further talk with her kind hostesses, Myra went away to rest, a new sense of hope springing up in her heart.

Yet her hopes and ambitions were lowly enough—a chance of earning her bread with friendly people, of costing no man or woman anything; of perhaps gaining a little by her favorite art, encouraged by an occasional lesson from Jack Leyton: these were her highest visions. If only he would *not* marry Dorothea Browne. She had nearly forgotten about her, but now it all came back—all Mrs. Dallas had asserted and surmised—but it did not disturb her much. It would not happen just yet, and of course Jack knew what was best for himself; so Myra soon sank into the sweet, soft arms of downy sleep, to wake with the ineffable strength of great content.

To Leyton repose did not come quickly. The last two days had been full of excitement. The thrill of horror which had seized him when he first heard of Myra's flight; the terrible dread that, desolate, isolated as she was, she might have listened to the voice of the charmer, and taken refuge with some untrustworthy lover—kept him on the rack until he had learnt the true story from Mrs. Keene. Even then he felt as if he had neglected her by being out of the way in her moment of difficulty. "Though it would have been deucedly awkward if she had taken refuge with

me. Would she ever have done so? No; not when Mrs. Keene was within reach. There is an extraordinary instinctive tact about that poor child. Is it the result of her unerring truthfulness? Will she grow hard and shift? Will the fair lines of her character be blurred, as delicate crayons are, by friction?" mused Leyton as he tried to sleep in vain. "Well, for the present there is a breathing space. If those good old souls will give her a home, and work, she will be safe and happy. But how long will it last? She does as well as many women who make a living by the brush or pencil. Forrester ought to do something for her, but—I don't want him to see too much of her. One never knows what innocent-looking corner the devil may be lurking behind; and she might take a fancy to him, though he is not attractive—at least, to me. He is not half bad, I fancy, and no fool, which I suspect I am—yes, a confounded fool, to come down here as I shall. It's awfully hard, after having drunk bitter water and eaten the flinty bread of affliction, till I thought I had forgotten what sweetness was like (all my own fault, it is true, which does not mend matters), to turn away from a bit of pure, genuine sunshine and innocent delight. After all, if there's a string in the honey, it will hurt no one but myself, and whatever happens, I *will* drink the cup offered me, let the dregs taste how they may. However Myra may turn out, she is infinitely fresh and real *now*. I can be of use to her, and I will be her true friend for her poor father's sake as well as her own. Ah, those eyes of hers are magnetic! How would they look with the love light in them? Well, I'll not think of *that*. What was the immediate cause of Myra's flight? Something that landlady told her—some tremendous exaggeration, no doubt; any way, it stirred Myra to gain her liberty. I wonder *why* Mrs. Dallas is so anxious to keep Myra to herself. It might be that—no—impossible—a dream"—and so he at last dropped into oblivion.

The day but one after Myra received a reply from Mrs. Dallas, which she opened with some reluctance. It was sentimental and effusive. She enlarged upon the misery she had endured, the cruelty of Myra's flight, her deep disappointment at finding she had not succeeded in attaching her poor husband's favorite niece ("I don't think he had any other," thought Myra), and described her mental and phys-

ical sufferings in consequence. Finally, she begged Myra to return to her home; that she should draw, or teach, or do anything. At all events, would she not come and spend a day with her? as she (Mrs. Dallas) was far too unwell to undertake a railway journey. No mention was made of Lionel.

Myra was dreadfully ashamed of herself when she had finished this epistle, yet not entirely converted to a belief in Mrs. Dallas and her good intentions. At all events, Leyton must read and comment on it before she would reply.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEYTON IN OFFICE.

It was nearly ten days before Leyton was free to begin his studies for the picture bespoken by Forrester. He found, to his great satisfaction, that a large number of his Egyptian sketches had been sold, the subject being the fashion greatly assisting his success. Altogether things looked brighter for him than they had for many a day; and with improved prospects came an unusual sense of responsibility—a wholesome touch of worldliness.

He was rather troubled than pleased by a sudden shower of invitations, very few of which he accepted. Among these few was a musical party at Lady Shirland's, where he was most graciously received. His old friend was immensely pleased by his success.

"My best congratulations," she exclaimed, when he had struggled through the crowd to where she was reposing after the fatigues of receiving, looking stately and handsome in black velvet and diamonds. She shook hands warmly with him. "I hear of you in every direction. Now, I hope you will not throw away fortune a second time. Be businesslike, and exact the last farthing of your prices. The respect paid to genius is as nothing compared to the esteem entertained for a man who looks sharply after his own interest."

"Very well, Lady Shirland, I will cultivate selfishness sedulously."

"Pray do. You know it is quite remarkable that you should have made a hit without brass or pushing. I must introduce you to Mr. Crackenthorpe, the rich Australian. He is buying pictures and everything else he can lay his hands on. There—there he is with Dorothea." She signaled with her fan, but Miss Browne took no notice. "Oh, *he* is the last! Never mind; I shall catch him at supper-time. Now tell me, what are you going to do next?"

"I have a commission from Captain Forrester to paint a bit of his woods."

"Oh, indeed! I hope he gives a good price."

"Yes; I am quite satisfied."

"You may be, but it does not follow that it is really good; and they say he is a screw."

"He is not, I assure you, and—— Isn't that dark, landified young fellow Ashby, the son of Mrs. Dallas?"

"Yes. He is always prowling about, seeking comfort from Dorothea and worrying about his broken heart. I wish he would try the 'Giant Cement.' Dorothea's anxious to persuade him to take a prescription of her own for agitated nerves. Apropos, I hear you have discovered the fair fugitive. What in the world made her run away?"

"I don't expect anyone knows—not even herself—yet. There must have been some reason."

"So you are not in the secret?"

"I am not, I assure you."

"But you went off to find her?"

"Yes. I knew Miss Dallas as a child, and I was very anxious about her."

"Pooh! My dear Jack, it was utter folly—childish romance. She could have gone away openly to her distinguished friend, the hotel keeper, if she liked."

"How was she to know that, Lady Shirland? To so unexperienced a girl as Myra Dallas, anything like authority seems potent; and to one who is so singularly divested of friends and relations, such an ally as the hotel keeper is not to be despised. I don't suppose there is a more isolated creature in the world than my old friend's daughter."

Lady Shirland looked hard at him.

"The more fool she, for quarreling with her bread and butter; and what objection could she have to young Ashby—he is good-looking and has pleasant manners."

"Oh, Heaven knows! Who can account for a girl's fancy?"

"Most of us are obliged to put our fancies as well as our pride in our pockets; and, considering her birth——"

"I trust she knows nothing of it," interrupted Leyton.

"I'm sure I don't know whether it would be better for her to know or not. Anyhow, it surprises me that Mrs. Dallas should be so anxious for the match, however great

her desire to gratify her son may be. It seems odd, doesn't it?"

"Extremely odd," returned Leyton.

"Does any solution suggest itself to you?"

"To me? No; certainly not."

"Well, I confess I am puzzled. Ah, Mr. Crackenthorpe! I have been looking for you everywhere. I want to present my friend, Mr. Leyton, to you. Mr. Leyton is the coming Titian, Claude, and Rubens all in one—one of our most rising painters. You must have seen his sketches from the Soudan?"

"Which are perfectly charming," exclaimed Dorothea, joining them. "I am so glad to see you, Mr. Leyton. What have you been doing since you returned to town? We never meet you anywhere;" and Leyton was swept away in her train.

The days, though perhaps a little long, were pleasant and bright, while Myra waited for Leyton's coming and the renewal of her drawing lessons. Now that all necessity for concealment was over, Myra begged that she might assist Miss Foley in the shop, in order to fit herself for the post she was ambitious to fill. Consent was half-reluctantly given, as neither of the "worthy principals" did seriously "incline" to believe that Miss Dallas—a young lady, a relative of such a highborn squire as Captain Forrester of Wickham Hall—could ever be really and truly their paid assistant. Indeed, much as they liked her, they would have preferred an ordinary and properly trained "young person." They did not like to say her nay, however; so, greatly to her own content, Myra officiated for a few mornings, and did better than anyone expected. Then she made haste to finish up whatever necessary needlework she had in hand, that the days might be quite free when Leyton came, to give her the dear delight of drawing under his instruction.

It was the day before that on which he was expected, and Myra was busy in the shop at that busy period of the day, after early dinner, when both boys and girls on their way to afternoon school ran in for pens and pencils and exercise books, etc. etc.—all needed immediately.

She was in the act of serving a schoolboy, when two gentlemen came up the street at a leisurely pace from the

Wickham Woods side. As they passed the front of Miss Foley's establishment, the younger and shorter of the two exclaimed:

"By George! she's at work in earnest, Wardlaw. Look there!"

Wardlaw looked in eagerly.

"That's the interesting young lady, is it? She *has* a look of poor Fred Dallas when he was young."

"It won't do to let this sort of thing go on," returned Forrester quickly. "But it is a shame for a man to leave his daughter, be she lawful or unlawful, penniless for another man to provide for. The Dallas family had some money, and I think that Frederic must have left something for his daughter. Here, here's the private door; we'll ring and ask for her in proper form."

They were soon admitted, and stumbling up the dark steps after Keziah, were ushered into the back parlor, which was sweet with prettily arranged flowers.

"This is a deuced nice room," exclaimed Forrester, walking over to the window and then surveying the apartment, "and a good lookout. I had no idea people of this sort—shopkeepers, you know—had such swell quarters. Of course, the big London tradesmen live like fighting cocks, but here, in this bit of a place, I didn't fancy they would have drawing rooms—drawing rooms any lady might sit down in, by Jove!"

"I don't think you have attended much to the progress of civilization," returned Wardlaw dryly.

"Look here!" resumed Forrester, "these two sketches on the mantlepiece are bits of Wickham. They are her work—my young relative's. Not bad, eh? You understand these things."

"Not bad at all," said Wardlaw, "and——"

The entrance of Myra cut his speech short. Both gentlemen bowed low, with an instinctive feeling of respect for the fair young creature who stood before them, who looked from one to the other with an expression of surprise. Tall and thin, her figure not quite developed, she was by no means of the small-waisted, dressmaker's type; the lines of her neck and shoulders and pliant waist were more likely to please an artist's than a modiste's eye. Her generally pale cheeks were slightly flushed, and her rich auburn brown

hair, which grew rather low and somewhat in a point on her forehead, was gathered back into a loose pile on the top of her head, leaving some tiny locks to curl lovingly round the white neck at the back. Her manner was quite natural, and though a little surprised, was undisturbed. Wardlaw thought that her simple, straight, black gown, with its narrow frill of white muslin at the throat, looked as distinguished on her as many of the costly costumes he had seen from the hands of renowned milliners.

A pleased look of recognition came into her large blue eyes as they rested on Wardlaw, but she addressed both men as she advanced a step or two.

"You wished to speak to me?"

"Yes," said Wardlaw, placing a chair for her; "both my friend and myself have a few words to say."

"Pray sit down then"—and Myra took the seat he offered.

"I wished to make the acquaintance of the young lady who ran away with my hansom and myself," began Wardlaw, with a kindly smile, "and to thank you for your pretty note."

"I am so pleased to have an opportunity to thank you again for your help, your goodness to me," began Myra, seriously. "I have often thought of you, and hoped you would not think I was doing anything very wicked, for I am sure you thought I was running away with someone."

"Or to someone," returned Wardlaw. "I must now acknowledge my mistake, and beg many pardons. I earnestly hope you will not refuse me the pleasure of your acquaintance as a punishment for my misjudgment."

"I shall always be pleased to meet you and speak to you," said Myra simply; then she turned her eyes on Forrester, who replied to her glance by exclaiming:

"I suppose you wonder what brought *me* here. I should not have intruded if I had not something to say concerning yourself."

"Concerning *me*?"—in great surprise.

"Yes. You see, now I know your real name, I find you are a kind of relation of mine, and I don't like your doing this sort of thing, you know."

"What sort of thing?" asked Myra, opening her eyes.

"Oh! the shop, and the selling things, and all *that*."

Myra colored.

"But you need know nothing about me," she said gently. "I am a stranger to you; let me remain one. I am happy, and at rest here." She sighed slightly, and something in her tone touched Wardlaw deeply.

"I don't want to be a stranger," said Forrester bluntly. "I want to be a friend and help you. It's a little difficult to begin about, though why it should be I can't say. Anyhow, your father doesn't seem to have provided for you; possibly he couldn't. Anyhow, I have a fair fortune which your father, had he lived, might have had, or some of it; so I wish to make you independent of shops and selling, so that you may draw, or paint, or do anything you like in moderation. I did not exactly know who I ought to address on the subject, and I thought I would come to yourself. You will see I mean all right. I brought Mr. Wardlaw because he is a great hand at business, and he is already a friend of yours; so you and he must make up your minds how much it will take to keep you fairly comfortable, and I will settle the money in some way. A life annuity is best, I think."

Myra gazed at him in great astonishment. "You are very, *very* good," she said. "But you cannot think what a quantity of money it would take. Why, I have heard Mrs. Dallas say that I cost her a hundred a year at least—she did not say it unkindly, you know."

"A hundred pounds! That is not ruinous! You and Mr. Wardlaw must settle it. Then you can study art, and make a fortune!" and Forrester laughed good humoredly.

"Are you really rich, and can you really spare this?" asked Myra with much gravity, adding as she turned to Wardlaw for corroboration, "can he?"

"I don't think it will ruin him," returned Wardlaw.

"I assure you I not should offer what would cripple me in any way. I am not what people would call a generous fellow; but I have some idea of justice," said Forrester.

"Then," replied Myra, "I will accept your kindness gladly. It is a great relief to know I need not be a burden to anyone, except to you, and *you* do not mind. I thank you heartily. You must take all my sketches if you think them worth accepting;" and she held out her hand to him with a sweet frankness that charmed Wardlaw. Forrester gave it a hearty shake.

"Well said! You are quite sensible and free from nonsense. Remember, though, I don't want you to stand behind the Foley counter."

"Very well. But you do not want me to go away at once?"

"Oh! as to that, do whatever you like, only do not go into the shop."

"There is one person I must consult," resumed Myra, "a friend of yours, and the only gentleman friend I possess—Mr. Leyton, and whatever he thinks best, I shall do. He is coming here to-morrow, so you can speak to him."

"Coming here? I think not. He has not told me," said Forrester.

"Oh, yes! he is coming to paint a lovely bit in your woods, and he is kind enough to let me try to paint it, too, under his directions." There was a moment's silence, both men making their own comments on this frank avowal; then Forrester exclaimed:

"I say, Miss Dallas, I wish you would tell us *why* you ran away from your aunt?"

"I was not happy, I wanted to work for myself," returned Myra, coloring vividly. "But do not think my aunt was unkind! she tried to make me as happy as possible, but—I would rather not speak about it. I think I was foolish."

"Oh, all right! You *were* rather foolish, but I will say no more."

"My friend Forrester has a fine English bluntness," said Wardlaw.

"It is well to be honest," returned Myra, looking at Forrester with a sort of indulgent smile, which nettled him a little.

"I have always thought so," he said stoutly. "Now I shall leave Wardlaw with you to discuss matters."

"I do not want to discuss anything!" said Myra earnestly.

"Perhaps Miss Dallas would prefer nominating Leyton her representative," observed Wardlaw. "He and I can arrange matters between the high contracting parties."

"Yes, thank you! I should much prefer it," cried Myra.

"Then we need not occupy your time any longer," said Wardlaw.

"And will you tell Leyton," said Forrester, "that I am

awfully sorry he did not let me know he meant to come down now, or I should not have made any other engagement? As it is, I am going back to town the day after to-morrow. Pray tell him, also, that the Hall is quite at his service, if he would like to put up there."

"Certainly, I will give him your message."

"Then we will wish you good-morning," said Forrester, rising.

"I shall only say *Auf Wiedersehen*," added Wardlaw, shaking hands with her.

"Oh, yes! I do hope I shall see you again," exclaimed Myra cordially; then giving her hand to Forrester, "Good-by," she said, "and thank you heartily for your great kindness."

"All right," said Forrester, with a friendly nod. "Don't let that aunt of yours bamboozle you into going back to her. You'll be better and happier on your own hook;" with which elegant valediction he left the room.

"Ask Leyton to come up and have a talk, in case you see him first to-morrow," were Wardlaw's last words as he hastened after Forrester, and they retraced their steps toward the Hall.

"Well," asked the latter, "isn't she a nice, sensible little thing?"

"She is; but not little—she is nearly as tall as yourself."

"Perhaps. Then she is so young—so almost childish—one thinks of her as little."

"Simple enough, if you like, and truthful, I think; but not childish. She is certainly like her father when I saw him last—nearly twenty years ago."

"Was he in Munich then?"

"No. At that time he had been living in London. I fancy he was arranging his affairs, which were somewhat tangled, I have heard."

"It was a shame to leave that girl unprovided for. I suppose she knows nothing of her mother's history?"

"I hope not," returned Wardlaw. "There is no necessity for such painful knowledge. I wonder Colonel Dallas did not settle something on her. He was as good a fellow as ever lived. I knew him very well. He told me about his brother's death, and greatly regretted the sort of estrangement which existed between them. It seems that

Dallas wrote to his brother begging him to break off with this girl's mother, and Frederic replied angrily; so the correspondence ceased. That was the reason Colonel Dallas took Munich on his way home, hoping to effect a reconciliation. The brothers used to be much attached until this unfortunate affair of——"

"Ay," interrupted Forrester, "that's always the way when women get mixed up in anything. They are the devil's own for making mischief. For a long time ours was a bachelor corps—only the doctor and adjutant were married. Then the old colonel was nabbed, and a married captain exchanged in; and so on, till the whole corps went to the dogs."

"You're an awful heathen, Forrester; but I am glad you are going to do the right thing. Your bark is worse than your bite."

"Maybe so. I say, Wardlaw, you know Leyton pretty well—is he 'straight-going' all round?"

"Yes; I should say particularly straight. But——"

"Ah! there are always 'buts' in some directions. Yes; I am glad to be of use to this left-hand relative of mine; but, mind you, Wardlaw, I'm not going to settle a fortune on her—a sufficiency according to her position is all she can expect. I am no Don Quixote."

"No one ever accused you of resembling the renowned knight."

"Ah, well, one must think of self in this world. I'll send a line to Leyton reminding him of his promise to stay at the Hall. He will get it before he leaves town to-morrow. What a curious affair it is!"

When left alone, Myra sat down to think, with a curious, dead sensation of being in a dream-haunted sleep. Her chief puzzle was how this curt, resolute, well dressed, and certainly distinguished looking young man came to be her cousin. Her ideas of social life—of relations, connections, and all the complicated articulations of family ties—were very crude. She was brought up within the borders of social Bohemia—a very gentle, innocent Bohemia, where the only aristocracy was that of genius. Of finery she knew nothing—of refinement a great deal; for vulgarity jarred upon her as something intolerable. She knew not why. Her dear, good Mrs. Keene was by no means highly polished,

yet she never offended; while Wilhelmina not unfrequently made her feel unwell. The buoyancy and brightness of her youth had been perpetually overshadowed by a sense of loneliness—a dim feeling that she could not define: that she was not like other girls, and that, somehow or other, her strange isolation was by no means counted to her for righteousness; that when her schoolfellows went away to parents and guardians and relatives, it was not altogether to her credit that *she* was left to spend her holidays at school.

On the whole, her ignorance of life—English life especially—saved her from many painful surmises; still, there was a deep strain of sad resignation running through the current of her life. Fortunately for Myra, she had no personal ambition. Music was dear to her for its inspiring harmony; drawing was even dearer, because of a certain inexpressible delight in reproducing on paper or canvas the effects which charmed her eye, and she forgot herself in both. She was slightly indolent by nature; but this was corrected by an inherent independence, which made it almost impossible for her to ask help—money help—from anyone.

Forrester's offer, therefore, was doubly welcome after her terrible experience of penniless dependence while with Mrs. Dallas. To have enough wherewith to provide for her small daily needs, and to buy herself pretty clothes, which need not be costly, filled her soul with tranquil pleasure. To be independent, and free to study the art she loved, was almost like heaven. What a piece of news to tell Jack, who was always her dear, good, true friend, to whom *she* could give nothing, but who was ready to do everything for her, and to trouble himself about an insignificant stumbler on the path to art like herself. Much as she liked the kindly sisters—her hostesses—she would not say a word to them till she had first told everything to Jack; so when Miss Foley said to her at tea that evening, "You had some distinguished visitors to-day, missie, my dear?" Myra said, "Yes, indeed. I shall tell you all about them to-morrow. They are very nice and kind, and Captain Forrester says he is a cousin of mine."

"Indeed!" cried Miss Foley with a very large note of admiration. "It is a pity there is not a lady up at the Hall, then he might ask you to go and stay there!"

"Oh! I don't think he would do that," said Myra,

laughing, "though I *should* like to stay at a real English country house."

If Myra was humility itself in some directions, she had not the slightest dread of those who, according to the social scale, were her superiors; a lady was a lady, a gentleman was a gentleman, and no more to her.

Next morning broke dull, soft, and drizzling, to Myra's great disgust. She had arranged in her own mind that Leyton was to arrive somewhere about early dinner time, and that after they might go into the woods together, and make a final decision as to where they should take their stand, and if Myra was to attempt the sketch in watercolors as she wished. Miss Foley, however, assured her that rain was greatly wanted for the country, and that probably tomorrow would be beautifully fine.

Myra had retired to her room after breakfast, to put the last touches to a bonnet she was making for her especial ally, Miss Letitia; she was anxious to get it out of the way before she began lessons with Jack, when she was startled by Keziah, who came with a smile on her rather wooden face, to say that "Muster Leyton was asking for 'ee." A hasty brushing off of threads and scraps, an equally hasty smoothing over of her hair and casting aside of her apron, and Myra ran down to greet her friend. "How good of you to come so soon!" she cried, giving him her hand. "I did not expect you till two o'clock."

"I intended to be still earlier," said Leyton, who looked somewhat grave and even annoyed, "but I could not get off."

"There is something the matter with you, Jack! you do not look pleased."

"Well, I am not, Myra," he returned, smiling. "I was in hopes that Forrester was off somewhere. Now he writes to me to lunch with him and stay there, and I don't know what. Now I just wanted to be free, and on my own hook, not to have him worrying after me."

"Oh, don't mind that!" cried Myra. "I have a great piece of news for you, and when you hear it you will be glad to see him anywhere; he has been so good to me!"

"Indeed!" said Leyton in a surprised, almost alarmed tone, looking earnestly into the blue eyes upraised to his own.

"Yes, he *is* good! though he is so odd and blunt. He came here yesterday with—who do you think?—the very same gentleman who let me drive with him in his cab the day I escaped—Mr. Wardlaw. I was so glad to see him; and after a few words, Captain Forrester told me he had found I was related to him, and that, somehow, part of his money ought to have been my father's; so he is going to give me an—annuity, I think he called it. I don't know how much, but I think a hundred a year, because——"

"A hundred a year!" repeated Leyton; "I hope a little more than that."

"It is a great deal, Jack! At first I was rather startled and shy about taking it, but both of them assured me that Captain Forrester had plenty of money, and that I, somehow, had a right to it; so I was very pleased and said, 'Thank you!'"

"I am very glad of this!" said Leyton, drawing a chair beside her as she sat down on a settee in the window. "Forrester has done the right thing. I trust he will carry it out, and settle a fair amount on you legally."

"Yes, I believe he will; and I think what he wants to talk to you about is this business. It is too bad to trouble you when you have plenty to do for yourself, but Mr. Wardlaw seemed inclined to make you a sort of guardian to me."

"Well, Myra, are you disposed to accept me as your guardian?"

"Yes, of course I am and very thankful to have you!" cried Myra with a happy laugh, stretching out her hand to him and giving him a frank, friendly pressure. "Isn't this great news? Now I shall be able to study, and I may be able to earn some money by drawing and painting, besides the joy of doing it."

"I have no doubt of it, Myra. I am delighted to go to the Hall on such an errand; but Forrester must shell out more than a hundred a year."

"I could never *ask* for anything more."

"No! but I could," returned Jack. "Your cousin is in Wardlaw's hands, and he will make him do the right thing; at any rate, we could not do much on a day like this, so I will get business matters over, and to-morrow we will start fair. By the way, I think my picture must be a 'Summer,' not a 'Spring' evening, for we are already in

June. I had a visit from your friend, Mrs. Dwyer, the other day. She brought me your pictures to take care of, but her object really was to tell me her ideas respecting young Ashby and his mother's schemes. We shall never be able to prove if she is right or not; she is inclined to color things; but if what she says is correct, I should like to give both mother and son the lash! You must have had an awful fright, my poor child!"

"I was *awfully* terrified! and *you* frighten me now. You look so angry, Jack! You must never be cross to me!"

Leyton laughed. "Do you think I should be, Myra?" taking her hand in both his own.

"Yes, if you thought I deserved it."

"Ay! I might be very, very angry under some circumstances; but, meantime, we are fast friends. Now I must be off. Prepare for my first appearance as a severe square-toed guardian."

CHAPTER XXII.

THROUGH THE WOOD.

LEYTON's interview with Forrester and his ex-guardian was, on the whole, satisfactory.

He was welcomed cordially, and found, first, that Forrester was going away on a cruise with some friends to Norway, and Wardlaw was returning that evening to town; secondly, that Forrester was more disposed to be just than generous. Nevertheless, he obtained a sufficient allowance to set Myra free—if she were careful—for study, to acquire the means of increasing her income. Both men were anxious that Leyton should act as Myra's friend and guardian. He hesitated; he scarce knew why. But, casting a mental glance round, he could think of no other possible person to fill this office. He therefore assented; whereupon Wardlaw remarked that he was glad of it, as he (Leyton) was well suited to act as her adviser in all matters connected with the art for which she seemed to have a decided taste.

"Quite decided, by Jove!" added Forrester. "I was a good deal struck with her work. She wanted to give me her drawings at once—very proper spirit on her part—but, of course, I will pay whatever you think they are worth, Leyton."

"You had better let her give them to you," returned Leyton. "You may pay for any others; but, just at the beginning, it will gratify her. You have really done her a great service, and she is naturally anxious to show her appreciation of it."

"Well, if you are so sentimental—both of you—let it be as Miss Dallas wishes. But, Leyton, I would rather she were out of this. You see, it would be awkward, her living on with these old book-selling women. Her connection with me would leak out, and it wouldn't sound well."

"All right. But she may as well stay until I find quarters for her in Paris; for I think she had better study in Paris.

Indeed, wherever she goes I shall have to look for some place for her; but Lady Shirland will help me."

"I suppose she has no friend who would take her in, even for a consideration?" asked Wardlaw.

"No one but a capital woman who knew her mother and would do anything for her; but, as she keeps a sort of hotel, that would not do. Myra Dallas is quite a gentlewoman."

"Ah, well, I've no doubt you will do the right thing," said Forrester. "As she has a little income now, I dare say some curate or doctor will marry her; and she will go on all right. I'll see my man Grove the day after to-morrow, and give him instructions to prepare a deed of settlement at once. I am very glad to be of use to my young relative, as I am quite willing to consider her. Now, Leyton, if you can find a respectable husband for her, we shall both have done our duty like men."

Leyton laughed—a somewhat forced laugh—and then changed the subject. Forrester pressed him to remain to dinner after taking a turn round the home farm; but Leyton refused. Wardlaw, who was going to call upon a neighboring family—acquaintances of his in London—offered to walk back to Redworth with him; so Leyton, having reiterated his thanks on behalf of Myra, took leave of Forrester; and for some little way he and Wardlaw paced on in silence, till some observation of the latter on the congenial topic of "birds" and the prospect of sport in the coming season started a lively conversation. At length even this topic was exhausted, and a pause ensued, which Wardlaw suddenly broke by exclaiming:

"I wonder what her little game was?"

"Whose?" asked Leyton.

"The widow's—Mrs. Dallas."

"You mean her wish to keep Myra in her hands? Yes; it is rather puzzling."

"What made the girl run away?"

"I fancy young Ashby's attentions were rather too pressing."

"Yet he is a good-looking, smooth-tongued young fellow. Many girls would have been charmed with him."

"Perhaps. There is no accounting for taste."

"Still, there is the extraordinary fact that Mrs. Dallas—a shrewd, worldly woman—should be more than willing to

let her son marry the illegitimate, penniless daughter of a poor painter. I wonder what can be the secret spring of her conduct?"

"That I cannot tell; but there *is* something under it all."

"I suppose all poor Fred's papers fell into his brother's hands?"

"No doubt; and what little property he had, too. Of course, as he died without a will, his daughter had no claim, and all went to Mrs. Dallas."

"What an infamous shame! Well, I am thankful that Forrester has done the right thing. That poor girl is tolerably safe now," said Wardlaw. "Forrester is a curious fellow—very hard, but not half bad. I am glad he has taken a fancy to Miss Dallas after his fashion. I wonder what circulates in his veins."

"Not blood, I should say," returned Leyton. "It's better for him, perhaps. When that kind of circulating medium catches fire, there is generally a big blaze. Well, I am pretty sure whatever *his* circulating medium may be, it will never ignite."

Wardlaw glanced at him, and after a moment's pause he observed, "My road turns off here, so I must wish you good-by. My best compliments to Miss Dallas. It is rather a cold message to a young lady who eloped with me; but, I assure you I am not less her devoted servant, if I can be of any use to her. I must say I should not mind having a daughter like her to look after me as I fall deeper into the sere and yellow."

"Yes, if she *would* look after you! But it's hard to say what a woman might do."

"Or a man either, for that matter. Besides, there are women *and* women. I've traveled farther on the road of life than you, though you have seen a good bit, too."

"The distance is nothing; it's the pace that kills," returned Leyton smiling.

They shook hands and parted. Leyton pressed on with a swinging step; he was eager to tell Myra the result of his interview; he was glad to think that the Hall would be shut up during his stay. What a curious freak of fortune it was that made him, in a way, Myra's guardian; for he could not refuse to accept the office thrust upon him; she had no other man friend in the world. It was but for a

short time she would need his services; in another year she would be of age, and her own mistress, if by that time she had not married "some doctor or curate," thought Leyton.

After all, there were not many men who were calculated to make Myra happy. She was so delicate, so unworldly, and had been so unfortunate. Happily for herself, she appeared to have little or no passion, plenty of tenderness, but—"I have no right to judge anyone's character through; least of all a woman's," said Leyton to himself, interrupting the course of his thoughts, "Myra may have mental depths I have not explored."

On reaching "Foley's Library," Leyton found Myra writing busily.

"What a long time you have been away!" she exclaimed, rising to greet him, "yet you have not really been long."

"Now I must give you an account of my mission," he returned. "On the whole, things have gone much as I wished." Myra resumed her seat, and Leyton, drawing a chair opposite her, repeated most of what had passed during his interview with Forrester and Wardlaw. "You see, then," he concluded, "you will be able (with economy), to live and study, if you wish to study your art. We must arrange some plan of life, for you cannot remain here. But I don't want you to plunge into any other work but sketching with me at the present; I am selfish enough to try and secure your company, if I can, while I am here," concluded Leyton, with one of his rare sweet smiles.

"Do you care to have me with you?" said Myra, resting her elbow on the table and her head on her hand, while she looked at him calmly and thoughtfully. "It *is* good to hear you say that, to know that I do not trouble you. I will never trouble you if I can help it, so I hope we shall always agree."

"That means that you do not undertake to give up your will and judgment altogether to your guardian?" asked Leyton, amused by her reservation.

"No, dear Jack, I do not! We might disagree about some matter of right or wrong, and there I should not let another think for me. But it is not likely that we shall differ; I am going to dare to be happy now. I can hardly believe that I shall not have to depend on anyone again;

that I shall always have a penny for a stamp, and two-and-sixpence for a pair of gloves. You cannot think how dreadful it was all those months with Mrs. Dallas, never to have a farthing of one's own! Oh! I cannot bear to think of it." She shuddered visibly.

"What was it you disliked so much, besides your impecuniosity?" asked Leyton, looking keenly into her eyes. "Was that young cub troublesome?"

"Yes!" returned Myra, growing a little paler. "I suppose it was weak and foolish of me, but after I went to live with Mrs. Dallas, the feeling of being in the room with him made me faint and ill, and his eyes frightened me. Then I wanted to like him; I tried as I saw it would please my aunt; and I knew that all these weary years I was miserable because I had no one to love me as my dear father did. And now, when Lionel was ready to love me, I felt only horror! It was ungrateful, too; but—it is over."

"It was curious, certainly," said Leyton, looking down thoughtfully, with an instinctive desire to hide the expression he knew was in his eyes. "All you have to do now is to forget all unpleasant things, and grow well and strong; for you look by no means robust, my dear ward."

"Oh! I shall soon be a giant of strength."

"And who are you writing to now?"

"To Mrs. Keene. She will be so glad to hear my good news. If you could only have seen the joy of Miss Foley and Miss Letitia when I told them the great news, you would have been amused and pleased. Now I want to write to Mrs. Dallas."

"Must you write to Mrs. Dallas?"

"Yes; I ought. I never had any quarrel with her. She always treated me well; and I behaved badly—everyone would consider it acting badly."

"Well, perhaps you had better."

Myra folded up her letter and put it into an envelope.

"I must pay Mrs. Keene five pounds she gave me, then perhaps it may be in time to prevent her selling the ring."

"What ring?"

Myra gave him the history.

"How good Captain Forrester has been to me! I *do* like him."

"He is rather a rough customer," said Leyton.

"I do not find him rough. He is sympathetic to me."

"I believe you are the first person who ever thought him so," returned Leyton a little gruffly. "Now I will leave you to finish your letters. If the evening is fine, may I come and take you for a stroll? I think the sun is struggling to show himself."

"Oh, yes, do. It will be delightful. And will you come back and have a cup of tea with my good friends?"

"To be sure. I shall quite enjoy it."

It would be difficult in so many words to convey the quiet happiness of the ensuing week or two—the thorough companionship; the complete comprehension daily developing between master and pupil; the long afternoons of work, sprinkled with discussions and sympathetic talk.

The extraordinary confidence with which Myra told every thought of her heart, every little event of her simple life, to Leyton, who was unchecked, untinged with the smallest suspicion that he could be a lover. He was her father's friend; her own and only old friend; and in his faithful friendship she believed much more intensely than she did in heaven—one was so near the other so far and so indefinite. The clear and healthy soul thus laid bare to him interested Leyton beyond all he had ever known or studied. In contemplating it he almost forgot the soft grace, the great, lustrous, appealing eyes, the sensitive mouth, whose effect upon his senses he once half feared.

He tried hard and honestly to keep up a composed and even indifferent tone in his intercourse with his pupil. It was such folly to lose his hold of himself a second time; besides, it would be stupid of a struggling man to dream of marrying, and it would be shameful to mislead so defenseless a creature as Myra. Though she was utterly untouched by any feeling save gratitude and regard, perhaps, if he melted into the lover, she would shrink from him as she did from young Ashby. Well, no; not quite in the same way. But if, as was quite probable, he were not acceptable her, their charming friendship would be at an end. No; of course it would never do to give in to such weakness. He was strong enough to guard both, and might enjoy the sweet dewy tenderness of this restful passage in his hitherto rugged way.

Meantime the days were all too short, the nights too terribly long; the separation, when the afternoon and evening's work was over—for he wanted sunset effects—infinately irritating. Sometimes, indeed,—only when invited,—he would go into tea—high tea—and Myra would play old German airs to him on a weakly little piano, which had once been the pride of Miss Foley's sitting room, and was at least in tune. How they transported him back to the pains and pleasures of his Munich existence, when Myra was quite a little girl—the cherished darling of a happy home, a pretty, inoffensive toy to himself; and now she was gradually absorbing him, though passion had not yet crept into the quick currents of his blood. She was interesting, too, as a pupil. She caught his ideas quickly, and improved greatly under his instruction. She had artistic feeling, and sometimes made suggestions respecting his own work which he did not disdain to accept. Yes; they were halcyon days.

To Myra they were too heavenly sweet. She only feared, poor child, warned by sad experience, that it would not, could not, last. Yet she did not let this innate conviction trouble her enjoyment—such gleams of sunshine were too rare, too precious not to be grasped anyhow. Perhaps her pleasure was more complete because it was more tranquil.

Myra was singularly free from selfishness in every form. She did not want to be more beautiful, more gifted, more exalted than her fellows. She was so little occupied with self, that she never stopped to regret that she was plain, or dull, or insignificant. She did not know whether she was or was not. Thus she was free to enjoy everything outside self without drawbacks. All she asked was to be loved; the only boon she craved was home life, neither of which it was, so far, her lot to find. She was glad to please, and quick to resent unkindness where it was meant, which she had the sense to see was rarely. It was this resentment which nerved her to meet Mrs. Dallas's harshness in the first years of her London life with an amount of courage, even defiance, which embittered that lady against her.

This freedom from self-consciousness is a shield to the girl so gifted. She does not see in every man she meets a possible or probable lover, and so does not lose her head, nor the freedom of unembarrassed manner, and the power of

frank expression, until the real ruler of her destinies appears; and even then not until some accident reveals that he is not quite "as other men are" to her.

This it was that made Myra so tranquilly, healthfully happy in Leyton's presence. He was a dear, delightful comrade, of whose superior knowledge, judgment, experience, ability she had the highest opinion, yet whose superiority did not crush her; she could speak out her own small thoughts, and dreams, and wishes without reserve. His somewhat matter of fact, brusque manner helped to keep the idea of love at a distance, and preserve the heavenly peace of this blissful interval.

The setting of the scene, too, was full of charm. The lanes were sweet with abundant hawthorn; wild roses beautified the hedge-rows; the paths through Wickham Woods were gay with groups of fiery lychis, and patches of woodruff lay at the feet of old trees. The woods had reached their loveliest stage: wide-spreading beech and blossoming chestnut, noble oak trees and grand old elms, bedecked in a transparent green. The midday sun sent his golden radiance through the lovely leaves, or sprinkled the soft, mossy grass beneath with drops of light, as the gentle air opened a passage for them.

The woods were perfect at this merging of May into June. From the deep shadows of "the swaying greenness" the coo of the ringdove came with a sleepy tenderness ineffably soothing, and where the open glades permitted a wider view, or, as sundown approached, strips of sky were visible, barred with crimson and violet, gold and pale lilac.

The point selected by Leyton was a bend in the trout stream which ran through Wickham Woods, where it was crossed by an old graystone bridge, lichen grown, its crevices defined with little ferns; and through the high arch a delightful peep could be had of the opposite bank, with its tangle of greenery dipping into the brown water. Following the stream was the widest opening in the woods. The ground rose steeply at the farther side, showing every variety of foliage, and the glade, still widening out and sloping downward, permitted a glimpse of the blue distance beyond. On this scene shone the western sun, in which the tender softness of spring light still lingered.

Leyton had never enjoyed any work so much. His senses seemed unusually clear, his perception of color, beauty, proportion, abnormally vivid; certainly, he had rarely painted so well.

The light was changing, and Leyton paused and stood back to contemplate the effect of his labors. "I think that will do," he said, "at least for to-day. You have brought me luck, Myra. I have seldom been so much 'i' the vein.' Let me see how you have got on. Hum, ah, not so bad! Your sky might be more diaphanous, but you'll manage with practice. You have not done much?"

"No! I have been watching you. This will be lovely, Jack; even better than an 'Autumn Morning,'" coming up to gaze at his picture.

"Yes! It's pretty good! but, after all, what a poor travesty of the glories of Nature one's best endeavor is. It is heavenly here." They stood silently side by side for a moment or two enjoying the tranquil beauty around them. The birds were now mostly silent, but a stray unmated blackbird poured forth occasionally his mellow notes, and the blackcap, flitting here and there among the underwood, uttered his rich, sweet song.

"Come," said Leyton with a quick sigh, "let us shut up shop! We will leave our belongings at the keeper's lodge; and if you are up to a tolerably long walk, say about two miles and a half, I can take you a lovely round through the other side of the woods, and past the house, back to the town."

"Oh, I am quite ready, Jack. I can walk farther than that!"

"Can you? You don't look like it."

"One can always do what is pleasant."

"You are a philosopher, Myra."

"Thank you! I did not know I was anything so fine," she returned, putting up her materials, which Leyton carried with his own. The sun was beginning to sink when they started homeward, and for some little way they walked in sympathetic silence.

"Your picture is nearly finished?" asked Myra at last.

"I want another day or two at it here; then I can finish in the studio as far as it *can* be finished."

"Shall you go away then?"

"Oh, I don't know. There are some other delightful bits farther up the stream; then I want to give you a few lessons in trees."

"Thank you, dear Jack; but you must not waste your time on me."

"If it is wasted? Nothing is wasted that gives pleasure."

Myra laughed—a happy laugh.

"I am uncommonly happy down here," added Leyton.

"So am I," returned Myra cordially; "but it will not do for you to stay here—you must be in London."

"I don't care for London. It is such a crush of struggling, selfish, swindling, competitive money grabbers, that an honest fellow has scarcely a chance."

"That is a dreadful description. I always think that everything would go to pieces if the good people did not outnumber the bad."

"I don't think your own experience can incline you to believe that doctrine, Myra."

"Yes, it does. I have not met unkindness, except at first from Mrs. Dallas, who really seemed to dislike me then. What chilled me has been indifference. Though some of my school-fellows were kind—they were even really fond of me—still, it was too dreadful at first. I used to wish I could die; if I were not so cowardly, I should have tried to kill myself. It was awfully strange to belong to *no one*; for Mrs. Dallas treated me so coldly, I felt as if I had no business to live. Night after night I have cried myself to sleep, my very soul aching for the clasp of my father's arms; then to wake and know that I should never, never feel them again." Her voice broke.

"It was too cruel," murmured Leyton.

"But I will not think of that miserable time here in this lovely sunlight and with *you*!" she exclaimed.

"No; try to look forward. Your worst days are over, Myra," said Leyton, drawing closer to her. "And I—I cannot stand the idea of your misery. Let us talk of something else. We must look up nice quarters for you in Paris. If my friend Marcy, and Madame, his wife, could take you in, it would be capital, and you would get on splendidly."

"I shall be terribly lonely, though; but that cannot be helped," added Myra.

"You will find troops of—well, say pleasant acquaintances—friends are always rare. Life lies before you, Myra; hitherto you have not lived."

"Ah, that is true; and I feel as if I could never emerge from the shadow that has been laid upon me. However, it is ungrateful to be downcast. I intend to be brave and active."

There was another silence. Myra looked down in thought. The emotion which stirred her gave color to her delicate cheek and a tremor to her soft lips, while her long dark lashes hid the eyes which Leyton felt were full of tears.

He was seized with an almost irresistible longing to take her in his arms, and tell her that so long as he had life she should never know another lonely, homeless hour. He pictured to himself the light that would come into her eyes, the heavenly sweetness of the smile that would part her lips. But he knew that as yet her heart had not spoken, that he was but a dear and valued friend; for Leyton was no self-adoring egotist. But he also knew that a word—a touch—might rend the veil which had hitherto hidden from Myra the knowledge that she was a charming woman, capable of giving and attracting that supreme love which is the crown of life. Something in her truthful simplicity, in the strength of her pathetic resignation, appealed to the chivalry, the profound tenderness of his nature. It would be almost blasphemous to "make love," in the ordinary sense of that expression, to so young, so inexperienced a creature. What was he, that he should expect to win the love of a fresh, unexplored spirit? And what had he to offer, save the ashes of his life? Indeed, there was something almost paternal in the protecting affection she had evoked in him; and yet he was half afraid of the smoldering fire within, which might burst into flame at any moment. He knew it was there, however he forced himself to disregard it, though despising himself for his contemptible weakness for permitting "the Sturm und Drang" of passion once more to disorganize his existence. He was restored to calmer thought by Myra's quiet voice.

"How sweet the air is—so fresh and full of the odor of earth and grass. But it is a long way round."

"It seems long because it is unknown. We shall soon pass the front of the house. Are you tired?"

"Oh, no; not at all. I can walk much farther."

Another pause, broken by Myra.

"Did you see Lady Shirland while you were in town?"

"Yes; and she was asking about you."

"I am afraid she thinks me ungrateful and bad for leaving my aunt as I did."

"She thinks there is something in it she cannot make out. Young Ashby, who seems quite an *habitué* of the house, has not, I dare say, given a very favorable account of you."

"I suppose not, and I am sorry. I like Lady Shirland. How much she must have seen to be so wise, so assured about everything; to be so often right, too, as one feels she is."

"Yes, and what a contrast to that extraordinary puppet, her step-daughter! she must be a terrible affliction to a sensible woman like Lady Shirland."

Myra turned her eyes full on Leyton's and laughed as if much amused. "I am sure you are very honest, Jack, or you would not have made that speech, if what Mrs. Dallas said was true."

"And what did she say?" asked Leyton faintly, interested.

"She said that Miss Dorothea Brown was going to marry you."

"Such might have been her intention, but she would be obliged to get my consent first. Do you mean to say, Myra, that you ever believed this hideous nonsense?"

"I think I did."

"Thank you. I should have thought you knew your guardian better."

"How could I tell? I know so little. I have seen so little. Miss Browne looks rather pretty in her bonnet and veil; she wears lovely clothes, and she is very rich."

"Three excellent reasons! I am flattered by your high opinion; and, pray, what was your own view of the proposed alliance?"

"I did not like it at all. I never could feel quite comfortable with Miss Browne, though she meant to be very kind. If she were your wife, you might grow like her,

and, any way, I should lose you, Jack. I could not tell you things; you would tell her."

"You have a poor opinion of my individuality. I assure you I would not lose my pupil for twenty, nay, twenty times twenty Dorotheas!"

"How good it is to hear you say so!" returned Myra earnestly, softly, as if to herself.

"So you must be a very diligent student to confirm my opinion of you, Myra."

"I will, indeed, work with all my soul and with all my strength," said Myra with almost religious fervor; "and I think I shall be able to do one or two things; nothing grand, you know, but something true."

"I think you will accomplish a good deal."

"But I wish, Jack, you would not send me away to Paris. I should never see *you*, and I am accustomed to London."

"My dear Myra, you are a free agent; I only advise; believe me, you would like Paris."

"I might; but I should like to stay with Mrs. Keene."

"We will settle all about that later, when *your* money matters are settled. Here! this is not an easy stile; once over, we are close to the grounds. You are not tired?"

"No, not in the least!"

"All right!" He climbed the rude crossway bars, which were more impediments than aids, and jumping down at the other side, stood, ready to assist his companion. Myra followed him with surprising ease for a town-bred girl; but, descending, the heel of her boot caught on a rail, and she would have had a nasty fall had not Leyton caught her.

It was a crucial moment, and involuntarily, though most consciously, his arms closed round her, holding her for an unnecessary moment or two pressed against his breast. Nor did Myra resist; she looked up to him with an expression of serenest happiness.

"You are not hurt, dear?" he asked anxiously, tenderly, and slowly relaxing his hold.

"Oh, no! You kept me from all harm!"

"And I always will, Myra, if—I can. You are sure you are all right?"

The rest of the way Leyton was very silent, and Myra did almost all the talking.

On reaching home, he went indoors with his ward; he felt unusually loth to leave her.

"Why there are two letters for *me*," she exclaimed as they entered the sitting room; she opened them quickly, handing the first to Leyton. "This is all about money from someone who signs himself, W. and J. Groves; and *this*—this is from Mrs. Dallas. She wants me to go and spend the day with her to-morrow. I scarcely like to go, yet I cannot refuse."

"Well, Myra, here is your first check," said Leyton, "and a receipt for your signature. Forrester has been prompt in settling your affairs. As to Mrs. Dallas, perhaps you *had* better go, and have done with it."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. DALLAS SCORES.

WHEN Myra woke next morning, she felt once again as she used in her dear old home, when Hedwig used to call her at cock-crow—the sense that life was sweet and the world very good. She had fallen asleep quickly, pleasantly overcome by the fatigue of a long day in the open air and an unusual amount of exercise. Her first waking thoughts were supremely happy.

Jack was really fond of her for her own sake; he was not merely kind from compassion, from any sense of old friendship with her father; he was really fearful of harm happening to her; he had been startled because she had narrowly escaped a bad fall—so startled that his heart beat strong enough for her to feel it as she lay for a moment against him. How sweet it was to feel for that moment the heavenly security of his embrace!

Whether it was right or proper to feel this did not trouble Myra. No doubt upon the subject crossed her mind. She only knew that she was happy; that Jack Leyton really liked to have her with him; that he never thought of marrying Dorothea—that funny, fanciful little doll. But he might—he probably would—marry somebody else; and then—How could she bear to lose him, for things could never be the same again? How could she live without seeing him and telling him everything? Then Myra knew she loved him as heroines love in novels, and as she never could love Lionel Ashby.

This sudden conviction did not disturb her very much. She would, of course, let no one else know; least of all, Jack. But there would be some happiness in being his dear friend; in doing him credit as his pupil; and for the rest she would enjoy the present, after her long fast from all that was sweet and bright and satisfying.

There is a marvelous concentration in profound feeling,

be it joy or sorrow. To the sorrowing or the enraptured it seems that the moment will never pass away.

Myra had hardly breakfasted when Leyton appeared.

"I came to make sure of your being in time," he said. "Punctuality is not the virtue of young ladies."

"I have only to put on my hat, and I shall be quite ready, Jack."

Myra met his eyes steadily enough, but the soft color mounting in her cheeks made Leyton feel uneasy.

"I telegraphed to Mrs. Keene to meet you. You cannot know your way about in that neighborhood."

"Oh, why did you? It will give her so much trouble; and I am quite accustomed to take care of myself."

"I know that," said Leyton shortly; "but I don't like it. I should go up to town with you myself, only——"

"And lose this beautiful day, Jack?" she interrupted. "Don't think of it."

"You will like to see Mrs. Keene?"

"I shall be delighted."

"Well, I have changed your check for you; and there is some of the money—not all. I will keep the rest for you. Take care you do not get your pocket picked."

"Oh, thank you. I don't think I ever had so much money before. Ought I not to write to Captain Forrester, thanking him for this?"

"I will do it for you."

"Oh, no; I should prefer writing myself."

"Very well," returned Leyton abruptly.

Having bought her a picture paper, put her into a corner place, commended her to the care of the guard, and told her the train by which she must return, he stood gazing after the train till it disappeared, and turned away, feeling that it was almost impossible to work alone, to fix his thoughts. In short, that he was but half himself.

As she sped onward, Myra reflected on the new courage her altered circumstances supplied. She was free, because no longer penniless; she need not ask anyone's permission to do this or that, because she need not ask anyone for money. But she must always be friendly with Mrs. Dallas. She had no right to doubt her good intentions; nor could it be denied that the wish of a mother to see her niece wedded to her son was a good intention on her part.

When she alighted in the huge, busy, bewildering station, she felt infinitely grateful to Leyton for securing her the comfort of seeing Mrs. Keene's round, kindly face amid a crowd of strangers.

"Oh, my dear, I *am* glad to see you," she exclaimed. "To think that I have never once been able to get away to pay you a visit. But the hotel has been that busy, and Willy away with some of her grandfather's people at Hull. Well, missee, you are looking pounds and pounds better than when you went away. Why, I never saw you look anything like it. Redworth must be a healthy place. My sisters are that glad to have you."

"And they are so good to me."

"Of course they are; and why not? And Captain Forrester—he *is* a real gentleman. I am sure I pray for him night and morning."

They sat together for a few minutes in the ladies' waiting room, and then Myra feared to delay any longer. "You needn't stay the whole afternoon with Mrs. Dallas, Miss Myra, my dear; couldn't you take a cup of tea with me before you go back?"

"I will try, Mrs. Keene. I should like to get away as soon as possible."

So Mrs. Keene saw her safely into the train for Earl's Court. It had a curious effect on Myra, this visit to the scene of her former imprisonment. It seemed such years back since she dashed wildly out of her aunt's house, hopeless, desperate, fearing she knew not what. And now! How could she ever thank God enough for her great deliverance!

"Glad I am to see you, miss," said Mrs. Dwyer in a low tone as she admitted Myra. "You look just another creature. She's in the dining room and by no means well."

"Myra!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, rising from the sofa where she was lying. "I thought I should never see you again. I have been, I *am* ill!"

"I am *so* very sorry," said Myra with genuine compassion. Mrs. Dallas did look ill; her fine eyes were sunken, her lips had lost their rich color, and her hair was so carelessly coiled up that it was already in disorder; there was an irritated, unsettled expression in her face, quite different

from the cool, self-reliant aspect which made her beauty forceful.

"You see," replied Mrs. Dallas, "I am not what I was, and I have you to thank for the change, Myra—you, and my son."

"It grieves me deeply to hear you say so," began Myra.

"Let us say no more about it now," interrupted Mrs. Dallas. "Take off your hat. *You* look well, Myra; you look like another creature. Who has worked this magic?"—looking keenly at her. "It seems to me like animal magnetism; or is it gold magnetism? Has Captain Forrester's unexpected bounty done all this?"

"Is it not enough to make a great change, to feel that I have something of my own? for Captain Forrester says I have a sort of right to it."

"I will tell you what your right is after luncheon," said Mrs. Dallas very deliberately.

"Thank you," returned Myra removing her hat; while she thought, "She is going to be very disagreeable, and it is quite early; I wish I had not come!" She was, however, genuinely moved to see how ill Mrs. Dallas seemed.

"And have you been staying all this time at that place—Redworth?"

"Yes. It is very nice and quiet, and I get a good deal of sketching."

"Captain Forrester's place is near it, is it not? pray, is he the attraction?"

"He has been away almost ever since I went there."

"What induced him to give you this—this allowance?"

"I do not know. His own goodness, I suppose."

"Bah! He must have an object. That ally of yours, Leyton, put it into his head. Where is he now?"

"He is painting a picture for Captain Forrester in his own woods."

"Ha! Is *he* living at Redworth, too?"

"Yes! The woods come down almost to the town."

Mrs. Dallas laughed—a sneering, uncomfortable laugh—and there was a moment's pause; then Myra bethought herself that she ought to inquire for Lionel.

"I believe he is well enough," was Mrs. Dallas's reply; "but I know very little about him. He has spent a heap of money; now he has run away to Monaco, after quarrel-

ing with me, and what he is doing there Heaven only knows. Another count in your indictment, Myra, but there is no use in talking to you. Tell me how you get through the time."

"Oh! I read and work, and I have been sketching a good deal lately."

"Yes, I suppose so! with Mr. Leyton."

"With Mr. Leyton," echoed Myra, feeling more and more uncomfortable. Mrs. Dallas dropped the subject, however, and began to talk of her own ailments, her dislike to Mrs. Dwyer, and her intention to go abroad.

"And why should you not come with me, Myra? You know I always treated you very well."

"You did, indeed!" cried Myra heartily.

"Then you can have no objection to being with me, and I promise you shall not be troubled with Lionel." This, and more desultory talk brought them through luncheon, after which Mrs. Dallas proposed going to the drawing room. "You see I have no flowers; I seem to neglect everything," she said, throwing herself into an easy-chair. "You see how much I want you, Myra."

Myra felt more than half frightened at the dead set made upon her. "You know, aunt, I am going to study in Paris; I have quite made up my mind to try and be an artist."

"It will be a beggarly business, I suppose," murmured Mrs. Dallas, and kept silent for a few moments.

"Tell me what Forrester said when he proposed to make you this allowance," she resumed, fixing her big black eyes on Myra.

"I suppose someone told him I was at Redworth; for he came quite unexpectedly one day, with a nice old—well, not exactly old—gentleman—Mr. Wardlaw—and told me I was a sort of cousin. He said if my father had lived he would have had some of the money he (Captain Forrester) had inherited; so he thought it right to provide for me."

"Some of the money," repeated Mrs. Dallas with an unpleasant laugh. "He would have had the whole of it, and you would have had it after him but for a trifling omission."

"I should have had all Captain Forrester's money? How could that be?"

"*All* old George Dallas's money would have gone to your

father, as next of kin, had he been alive, and to you after him. Unfortunately, one circumstance barred your succession."

"What was that?" asked Myra.

"Your father and mother omitted the ceremony of marriage."

"What *can* you mean?" asked Myra, too bewildered to take in her cruel meaning. "Why, of course they were married."

"Who told you so?"

"Nobody told me so. I know it."

"How do you know?"

"They were always man and wife. Mrs. Keene knew it. She always speaks of my mother as Mrs. Dallas, and says she was an angel of goodness. You cannot be in earnest, Aunt Dallas."

"I am—bitterly in earnest. Hitherto I have not told you, because you were too young; and I thought that, if you married Lionel, you need never have known the stain upon your birth. Lionel knew all about it. Judge, then, how much he loved you when he could overlook what other men would shrink from. You will never find another who would willingly ally himself with the daughter of an unmarried mother."

"If this be true, then, how was it that *you*, who were not in love with me, agreed to such a degrading marriage for your son?" cried Myra, who was vibrating with indignation, tinged with vague, growing terror.

"Because I am as foolish about him as *he* was about you. But I am glad that folly is over. I liked you and bore with you for Lionel's sake; but now it is all over. I am glad he has escaped marriage with you."

"There must be some mistake somewhere," said Myra, the color fading from her face; "some incompleteness in the ceremony; some—Oh, no. When I think of my dear, good father, I know it is quite impossible that he should not have been really married to my mother. Have you ever seen her picture? Have you ever looked at that sweet face?"

Mrs. Dallas shook her head.

"No amount of sweet looks can prove correctness of life. The mistake which prevented your parents being married

was a very big one—your mother left her husband to live with your father.”

“I do not believe it,” said Myra, more collectedly than she had hitherto spoken, and rising to her feet in her wrath. “It is too monstrous; and you are so glad to tell me these cruel things that you make them as bad as you can. I will go and ask——”

“Ask whom you will,” interrupted Mrs. Dallas, “you will only find my tale confirmed. Why, you ignorant child, don’t you know that if you were *not* base-born you would be a wealthy heiress, with all the world at your feet? Had your father lived, he would have inherited the fortune of old George Dallas, and he could have bequeathed it to you. Had you been legitimate you would have succeeded to it instead of Forrester. Knowing that you were left a beggar, he took compassion on you. It ought to be a warning against such unlawful connections, to know that the wretched offspring are cut off from every tie. Have you not wondered that you never heard of your mother, nor of a single connection on her side? Why, you had nothing, and belonged to no one. If you want proof, here—here is a letter from your father to my husband. I found it among his papers. Do you recognize the writing?”

She took from a small leather bag she usually carried a piece of paper, yellowed by years and covered with small delicate characters, and gave it to Myra, whose eyes filled with tears at the sight of the writing.

MY DEAR BROTHER [she read]—Your letter has broken the last links which bound us to each other. I cannot dispute the common sense of your remarks; but they are wasted on me. We—my beloved companion and myself—are the victims of unhappy and most unfortunate circumstances; but no consideration for friends, fortune, or character can part us. No lawfully-married wife could have won profounder respect, more tender affection, than she has, who is everything to me. Should an opportunity ever offer, I shall gladly seize it to make her legally mine. So I bid you—sadly, yet unhesitatingly—farewell; for while you express yourself in such terms we can hold no communication. Yet I shall never forget that I was, perhaps am still, your attached brother.

FREDERICK DALLAS

Myra looked eagerly back to the beginning.

“No,” said Mrs. Dallas, divining her thought, “there is

no guiding date—only the day of the month. But the letter is old. Now, Myra, are you convinced?”

“Convinced that there is some terrible story below it all,” returned Myra with white, trembling lips, but keeping resolutely calm. “I may not be legitimate, but somehow, I cannot believe my parents to blame; and *you* do not believe that I am illegitimate,” she exclaimed with sudden fire and conviction, “or you would never, *never* have wished me to marry Lionel!”

“Thanks for your gratitude,” returned Mrs. Dallas with a flash of deadly hatred from her eyes. “You would be wiser if you accepted Lionel’s generous, disinterested affection, and hid your painful origin under the cover of his name. It is about the only chance you will ever have of acquiring one. I don’t think you will find any other man willing to take you; and I suppose you are aware that you have no right to the name of Dallas?”

Myra did not reply, she stood with the letter in her hand as if she did not hear, very white and still. Then she crossed over to where she had laid her hat, and deliberately put it on. “I will keep this letter,” she said, turning to face Mrs. Dallas, who watched her with a curious mixture of surprise and apprehension. “Good-by. I cannot understand you; but I will never voluntarily speak to you, or see you again. You have told me this cruel story to revenge yourself, and you have almost broken my heart but you have not crushed me, nor have you done yourself any good.”

She stood yet an instant, her eyes fixed upon her aunt’s, which lowered themselves involuntarily, while she thrust the letter into her bosom, and then quietly left the room, closing the door.

“And I cannot understand *her*,” said Mrs. Dallas to herself; “is she a mere gentle, obedient doll? or is there fire and fury under the snow? Have I been unwise in rousing her? Bah! what can she do? She can never disprove the truth of what I have told, and a sense of isolation may drive her back upon Lionel at last.”

When Myra left the house she mechanically took the way toward Keene’s Hotel; walking on and on, lost in thought, battling with the conviction forced upon her by the proof produced by Mrs. Dallas; of the disgrace and degra-

dation which shrouded her parents and herself. She clung to the idea that if she only knew the *whole* story, there would be some cruel fatality which might in some way exonerate them. Whatever it might be, she was resolved to have faith in those dear ones, her loving memory of whom had kept her soul alive through the parching drought of the social desert in which she had wandered. Now she saw why she had been so alone, and knew that she must always be alone; but she would accept her fate, nor would she ever breathe a word of the bitter secret deposited with her. No! not even to Mrs. Keene would she say a word; perhaps only members of the family—not her family, she had none—knew the truth about her father and mother, and was it not a sacred duty to shield their reputation, their memory? For herself, she must brace herself up to be alone always. And Jack Leyton! No! he did not know. He had only been in Munich after her dear—dear, though unknown—mother's death, and he could know nothing. Death shrouds most things. She would have liked to ask him some questions, but on this topic she could never speak; silence and endurance must be her portion. Come what night, she would keep her faith in father and mother intact; one day she would discover the truth, and the truth would justify them.

Wrapped in these distressing thoughts she had walked on and on mechanically, till she found herself near Hyde Park Corner. To stand about and struggle for a place in an omnibus seemed impossible; she therefore took a cab to Mrs. Keene's, pondering in a half-dazed fashion what she should do. To go back that evening to be questioned as to her interview with Mrs. Dallas was more than she could bear; she must secure a breathing space.

"Why, goodness, gracious me!" cried Mrs. Keene when she reached her haven, "how bad you do look, missec. I did not expect you for an hour or more. Have you been took ill?"

"Not exactly, but I have a dreadful headache, and feel faint. Could I stay with you to-night, dear old friend?"

"Why, yes, of course! It would never do for you to be traveling alone. I will telegraph to my sister, and tell her I insisted on your staying. Why, your hands are as cold

as ice! What on earth has that—that woman been saying to you?”

“Nothing very pleasant; but it is too long a story to tell now.”

“Never mind! I will send off the telegram, and get you a nice hot cup of tea. Take off your hat, Miss Myra, my dear, and just lie down on the sofa, no one shall disturb you; I’ll be back directly,” and she bustled away.

Myra followed her advice. Indeed, she felt hardly able to stand; her heart beat feebly, as if exhausted after the painful agitation she had undergone. She was either sleeping or partially insensible when Mrs. Keene returned, but she roused herself, and found the fragrant cup of tea presented by her kind hostess very reviving. Mrs. Keene talked on cheerfully about “Keene and Willy,” and “the business.” Suddenly Myra interrupted her.

“How long ago is it, Mrs. Keene, since you saw my mother?”

“Let me see, the first time I saw her, when she saved me by her care, was—well, it must be quite twenty-two years ago; and the last time you were a wee toddles about two when I went back to Munich.”

“You knew my father also?”

“To be sure I did. A nice elegant gentleman as one could wish to see, and such a devoted husband. He just loved the ground the dear lady trod on. Ah! you don’t often see the likes of him now.”

“What used they to call my mother in Munich?”

“How do you mean, missee? Why, Mrs. Dallas, to be sure.”

“Used she often to go out to parties and those sort of things?”

“Oh, no; she was always with your father. He did not care for society; and she never left him. Have a bit more toast, Miss Myra—you don’t eat enough.”

“Thank you; I only want the tea—it is so nice. Mrs. Keene, I want to study painting. I believe I am to go to Paris; but, until things are settled, would you let me live with you—board with you, I mean?”

“To be sure I would, and glad to have you; but, you know, missee, my dear, it wouldn’t do for you to *live* with

me, not for long—you must live with a gentlewoman like yourself.”

“I only want a bit of home—to be with someone who cares a little for me. Oh! I wish I were dead and out of the way.”

“Why, my goodness, gracious, Miss Myra——”

Mrs. Keene was beginning, when Myra suddenly threw her arms round her, and, leaning her head on the good woman's plump shoulder, burst into an agony of tears, sobbing as if her heart would break, until quite exhausted, when Mrs. Keene insisted on putting her to bed and bathing her temples with eau-de-cologne and water. Leaving a night-light on the mantelpiece and the bell-pull within touch of her hand, she sat down and watched the weary girl till her regular breathing told that balmy sleep had blessed her with oblivion.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE DEPTHS.

THOUGH immensely relieved by her outburst of weeping Myra slept but little; and Mrs. Keene insisted on her resting until the afternoon. She took the precaution of writing to her sister by the last post on the previous evening to warn her that Miss Dallas could not be with them before six o'clock; so Myra acquiesced gratefully. She was glad to be at rest—glad to arrange her thoughts and plan her future. Everything was changed and hopeless in the new light shed upon life by the revelation of Mrs. Dallas. Resignation and work must give her strength, and silence be her consolation.

It was a wet evening when she reached Redworth—wet and dull. As soon as the train paused beside the platform, the door of her carriage was opened by Leyton.

"You have given us all a fright, mademoiselle," he said, looking sharply at her as he assisted her to alight; "and I must say your looks do not belie the report we received. What has happened? You seemed in the most robust health when we parted yesterday."

"Yes; I seemed quite right. But it was hot and close in town; the noise, the rush, seemed to overpower me, and brought on a violent headache."

"Naturally enough. You have not quite got rid of it yet. Come—I will not let you walk up. Here is a fly, as they call them."

"I can walk quite well."

"My dear Myra, you must do as your guardian directs."

Myra smiled and obeyed. The drive to the High Street, short though it was, sufficed to show her what an effectual poison Mrs. Dallas had introduced into her existence. She was very silent; for she had to look at every topic which suggested itself before she spoke, lest it might evoke curi-

ousity or awake suspicion. Then Leyton scarcely took his eyes from her face. Why did he look at her so intently? Did he know? Did he suspect that *she* knew?

"Do I look very dreadful, Jack, that you look at me so steadily?" she asked at length with a faint smile.

"Forgive me. I did not know—that is, there's something come into your face, or gone out of it, since you left me yesterday that worries me. Something happened yesterday which you will not tell—that is, at present. But you do not intend to keep me always in the dark. I am sure you will trust me, Myra."

Here they stopped at Miss Foley's door; and Myra was able to avoid a direct answer.

The good sisters were ready to receive their young favorite with a hearty welcome; both exclaimed at her pale cheeks and languid air. Then Miss Foley returned to mind her own business, while Miss Letitia remained to pour out tea, and wait upon the traveler.

The evening meal was spread near one of the windows of the best parlor, through which came the fresh scent of the flower garden beneath; the outlook over the rich green of the race course to the ruined abbey, behind which the sun was setting, suggested peace and prosperity. The room had been adorned with flowers in deference to Myra's taste, and the table prettily laid.

"You will, perhaps, join Miss Dallas at tea, Mr. Leyton?" said Miss Letitia, with her sweetest simper, her head a little on one side.

"With pleasure; I always enjoy a cup of tea here," returned Leyton readily; and he continued to speak of the pleasant view, the excellent position of the house, and such matters, in what Miss Letitia considered a fascinating manner, until Myra had returned after lying aside her hat, and brushing away the dust of travel.

"It is too nice to come back here," she said with a sigh as she stirred her tea, "the sweetness and repose are heavenly after the turmoil of London."

"You used not to dislike London so much," observed Leyton.

"I knew no other place to compare it with!"

Then Miss Letitia inquired for Mrs. Keene, and the conversation turned on her husband, her hotel, and her grand-

daughter, until Miss Letitia began to put the tea-things together, and rang for Keziah to clear away.

"You'll be wishing to speak on business, I dare say," said the worthy spinster, "so I shall go and do a little shopping before closing time;" and she left the room.

Myra went across to the window, which was furnished with an old-fashioned seat, and sitting down somewhat wearily, in a corner, leaned her elbow on the window sill, and rested her head on her hand, her face turned toward the garden.

Leyton followed and took possession of the opposite angle, and having looked at her in silence for a moment, exclaimed:

"You are awfully dead beat, Myra?"

"Yes, I am ashamed of myself!" turning her eyes on his, and trying to pull herself together. "I shall be quite right after a quiet day in this nice home-like place."

"Myra, tell me about your interview with Mrs. Dallas."

"It was not pleasant, as you may imagine; she said all I expected, and more."

"I hope you did not see that cub—her son?"

"Oh, no! thank Heaven! but she said he was ill, and that it was *my* fault; that upset me a good deal! If he is so fond of me, why do I not love him?"

"I'm sure *I* don't know," returned Leyton rather grimly.

"I suppose you are one of the stony-hearted, who do not respond to the affection lavished upon you."

Myra shook her head, and smiled a thoughtful smile. "No one has ever lavished much upon me, Jack. I am rather unfortunate in shrinking from the only person who did love me," and she shuddered slightly.

"I don't wonder at it," cried Leyton. "He must be a selfish hound, to set his mother worrying you in this way."

"But I don't like the idea of his being ill and unhappy."

"Nonsense, Myra, don't be morbid! If you let this sort of sentimentality get hold of you, why you'll let yourself be persuaded to marry young Ashby out of pity."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she exclaimed. "You would not allow me, would you?"

"I could not prevent you; you could marry whom you

choose! You may allow me to call myself your guardian, and I may be useful to you in that position, but I have no power or authority of any kind over you!"

"Haven't you, Jack?" looking into his face with a smile at once sweet and playful, that seemed to say, "You know you have"—a smile that sent a curious thrill through Leyton's veins, and kept him silent for a moment.

"Was this all that passed between you and Mrs. Dallas?" he resumed.

"She said a great many more unpleasant things, but there is no use in repeating them. At last, I told her I thought she was actuated by anger and unkindness, and that I would never voluntarily see her again."

"Bravo, Myra, well said!" cried Leyton in hearty approval. "I hope you will stick to that. Why should she annoy or insult you? I wonder what that woman's game can be? Well, I hope you have seen the last of her. I fear she must have upset you frightfully."

"She did—and, Jack, I do not want to speak of her any more. I want to put her out of my head, and give myself altogether to my work. Do you think, if I am very diligent, and try very hard, I may do well enough to make a place for myself—a little place?"

"I do not doubt it, Myra. You have taste and ability; but what does this sudden ambition mean? The day before yesterday you wanted spurring, to-day——"

"Oh! I have been reflecting, and I am ashamed of my own idleness and indifference! I must show Captain Forrester that I can build my fortune on the basis he so kindly and generously gave me."

Leyton did not reply; he looked at her steadily, with a surprised, questioning expression, which gradually softened to one of yearning tenderness. Myra turned slightly away, and looked across the stretch of green.

"Myra," said Jack leaning toward her, and taking the hand which lay listlessly in her lap, "you are keeping whatever it was that most distressed or offended you from me. I think it will relieve you to tell me; and don't you think you might trust me?" There was a pause; she left her hand in his, as she turned slowly toward him.

"Trust you, Jack!" she murmured in a low tone. "Of course I trust you. Whom have I to trust but you? It is

no use, however, dwelling on unpleasant things; so we will say no more about Mrs. Dallas or her unkindness."

She pressed his hand slightly as she withdrew her own.

"Very well, Myra. But I will tell you what makes me uneasy. I am awfully afraid that Dallas woman has said or done something which may dispose you to think yourself bound to marry Lionel Ashby, even against your own instincts. Remember, Myra, I would never consent to such a thing—never. I would rather shoot him, if I swung for it!"

Myra smiled at his vehemence.

"You need not fear, Jack. I will never marry anyone you don't like."

"Then you will have a very limited choice," said Leyton with a short laugh.

"Tell me," asked Myra, as if anxious to change the subject, "did you get any work done yesterday? It was quite fine as we drew near London."

"In the late afternoon I did a sketch of the keeper's lodge; but I could not make much of it—I was not in the vein. If to-morrow is fine, will you come for a long day in the woods? The sunset promises well. I think a few more bright evenings will finish all I want out of doors. Then I want to make a picture of the interior of that old abbey; and you must do it, too."

"If you think I could, Jack."

"You could try. I do not think you would find it difficult. What time will you come out to-morrow?"

"I will come late in the afternoon and join you, Jack. I do not feel inclined to draw, or do anything; so do not wait for me. I will come if I can; and I think I should like to go and lie down now—talking makes my head ache—and I want to be quite, quite well to-morrow, and able to begin work in real earnest."

"In short, you want to get rid of me. I wish to Heaven you had not gone up to that infernal rackety London and brought on that headache."

"It would have come on anyhow, I dare say," said Myra with a sigh.

"Well, good-by, if I must go," said Leyton.

He held her hand for a moment, and then went away for a long walk across the fields to commune and wrestle with

himself. What was the reason of Myra's disturbance? Why did she seem averse to be with him? Had his almost involuntary embrace, when he saved her from falling, suggested to her the nature of the feelings she had roused within him? And did she shrink from him with a girl's natural timidity, or any serious reluctance to change a friend for a lover? Was it possible that the hearty liking which she evinced toward him with such delicious frankness was an indication that he was fated never to call forth a deeper and more passionate attachment? However that might be, Leyton was in no doubt as regarded his own condition of mind. He knew that he longed for the love of this lonely young waif with all his soul and with all his strength. All the fire and energy of early youth seemed to have come back to him, mellowed by a considerate tenderness, which made no sacrifice seem too great for the happiness and welfare of the girl he had grown to love so well. Why, then, should he hesitate? His prudential calculations of a fortnight before melted into thin air. He was getting on; his pictures were going off; he had a couple of commissions besides "A Summer Evening." The future was brightening; and Myra sorely needed a home and a protector. He would risk it, and ask her to be his wife. If she refused—well, the worst effect would be the crippling of his powers to serve her; but that would arrange itself after a short period of discomfort. If she loved him, life would be only too heavenly. Why had he hesitated so long? Now he would only wait for the first promising opportunity to try his chance.

Leyton called early the following morning, and heard that Miss Dallas had not yet left her room; nor did she join him that afternoon. He wasted his time looking and waiting for her, and returned feeling anxious and irritable.

In the evening he found her, however. She was at the piano, while Miss Letitia was diligently plying her needle. Myra was still pale, and the hand she gave Leyton was cold and tremulous. She offered to play some of the old airs of which he was fond—perhaps, he thought, to avoid conversation. She was very sweet and calm, and spoke with pleasure of recommencing work on the morrow.

But the morrow was dull and damp. It was, therefore,

not until the third day after Myra's unfortunate expedition to London that Leyton found himself alone with her in the woods, where they had spent so many happy hours.

But a change had come o'er the spirit of their dream, a change which greatly puzzled Leyton; for it showed itself altogether in Myra. She had never been talkative; but at times, if touched or interested, she would speak of her own feelings and impressions with delightful candor. To-day she was not more silent, but Leyton felt that she thought before she spoke, while there was an indescribable resoluteness in her composure that made her seem much older than the week before. She was very diligent and careful in her work, frequently asking Leyton for advice and guidance. She listened to him, however, as sympathetically as ever, but was only like her old impulsive self when she looked at and commented on *his* painting.

The curious gravity and collectedness which had come to her had its effect on Leyton. He thought of her even more continuously than before; the new phase she had developed interested him profoundly—as any veiled corner of heart or mind in a woman almost always does interest men for whom the undiscovered has so many charms—but it held him in check. There was something in her mood so unfavorable to a declaration of love—so far away from passion or any recognition of the melting mood—that Leyton determined to wait and watch. Myra had been suddenly transformed from a tender, clinging, impulsive girl,—still half a child,—to a thoughtful, self-reliant woman, and, therefore, more worth winning than ever.

A week had nearly passed since Myra received the cruel blow dealt by her aunt, and the closing shadows warned her and her companion it was time to return.

"It is charming, Jack," she exclaimed, coming behind him to look at his picture, when she had put up her own materials. "You will not touch it any more?"

"You think I had better not?"

"Oh! you must not mind what I say, I do not know enough; but it seems to me that it cannot be made better."

"Perhaps! I'll take a look at it to-morrow. If you are right, we'll say good-by to the woods for the present. You have come on with your trees wonderfully, and to-

w we'll try the ruins; those arches will be good
ce for you."

es. I am very anxious to try something fresh."
am awfully sorry to leave the woods, though. It is
a long year since I have enjoyed my days as I have
,

weet woods," said Myra, as if to herself, and looking
, "good-by!"

h, come, Myra! we are not going away forever."

'ho knows?" she replied dreamily; and, taking up her
box, she walked on slowly, while Leyton loaded himself
the rest of the impedimenta, which he usually left at
eeper's lodge close by. "You do not care to make
our this evening?" he asked as they walked homeward.
o, I do not care for a long walk. I dare say in a few
I shall feel fatigue less."

ou have not recovered from that confounded trip to
yet, Myra."

ot quite; but I am much better"—a pause of some
es, then she began again—"Jack, you said you knew
people in Paris who might take me in; would you ask
about it?"

'hy, I thought you did not like the idea of going
—that you dreaded it, in short!"

do not like it now; but I have been thinking very
Jack, and I see that it is weak and foolish to hesitate on
ink of anything. I see, also, that I ought to learn to
d on myself, and be sufficient to myself; so I want
away, and begin at once."

is a pretty hard lesson to learn, Myra. You cannot
just yet, however. Paris is awfully hot in July, and
udios indescribably stuffy; wait till the end of August.
while, I will write to Madame Marcy and get all in-
tion for you. What has put this so suddenly into
head?"

conviction that I must not lose time—that I must
seriously."

ut you have not been doing at all badly."

ell me," continued Myra, not heeding him, "do not
rtists grow to love their work better than anything in
orld, and want nothing beyond it?"

'ell, yes; some do."

"Do you think I shall ever be like that?"

"It is hard to say. I rather doubt it. I am very much taken up with my art; but I want one or two things desperately besides. Then I am not what really great painters are—artists pure and simple. I am more mixed."

"I suppose I ought to study life?" said Myra with a sigh.

"You'll do no good work if you don't; and it's awfully hard for a woman to do anything first-rate."

"I suppose so. Why is it, Jack?"

"Well, it's not deficiency of intellect—it is mere diffidence. Then you are terribly weighted with heart—or whatever the thing we call heart is. Very few can stand alone. When they can—well, it is generally the hard, in-artistic women who are able to make a place for themselves. I do not think you are that sort, Myra; you are too womanly to be independent."

"I must do something, you know, Jack; and I like drawing and painting best. Do you really think it is worth my while to study and spend money?"

"Certainly. Many women make a good thing of it, especially when they are not too ambitious."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I am not ambitious, but I want to succeed in this."

"And you will, no doubt. Let us go on to the old abbey, and choose a bit for to-morrow morning's work."

This took a considerable time; and Leyton spent some more explaining to Myra how arches should be treated, to which she gave earnest attention. Then they walked slowly to Myra's abode, and parted at the door; for she did not ask him to come in. This, too, was a departure from her ordinary frankly expressed wish for his company.

The weather proved propitious and Leyton succeeded in doing a very pretty sketch of the ruined abbey. He was very pleased at finding it prove a better subject than he expected. Occupied with his own work, he had not paid much attention to Myra's, and when they returned from the scene of their labors, he said decidedly:

"I will come in and see what you have done. I have neglected you rather these last days."

"Thank you," returned Myra; and went on before to open the parlor door and give him light enough to avoid dangers of the little the stairway.

It wanted an hour or more of tea time, and the Misses Foley were both busy in the shop. The parlor was empty, and flooded with the mellow evening light.

"Now, then, for the rigid criticism," said Leyton, seeking Myra's eyes, to pour into them an assurance from his own that her meanest attempts had a value for him; but hers were occupied by the strap of her sketching book, and he noticed that her hands were not too steady.

She opened the book before him, and then took a step or two away to the window, as if she lacked courage to look on at his examination. She was tired, and stood with her head leaning against the gray chintz curtains which draped the window.

"Do you know, Myra, I really cannot compliment you on your progress during the last few days? Your hand is not so steady; your lines are nothing like as bold and free as they used to be. I suppose it is the result of——"

He stopped abruptly. His ear caught something like a suppressed sob, and, looking round, he saw that Myra was holding her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Myra," he exclaimed, coming quickly to her side, "what is it? I was a brute to speak so roughly about your drawings. I——"

"No, no; you were quite right. You have said the truth. But I should not mind that, only it makes me fear I may never be able to do anything; and if I haven't art to cling to, I have nothing left in life. Do you think I shall be a total failure, Jack?" and she laid her hand on his arm.

Leyton caught it in both his own and kissed it tenderly.

"Myra, my darling," he said in a low tone, full of passionate feeling, "something disturbs you which you will not tell me. Let me tell you *my* secret—if it is a secret." He quietly drew her to him as he spoke. "I love you with all my heart and soul. The days you were away were intolerable. All I ask, all I desire, is to have you beside me for the rest of my life. I am not worthy of you, dearest. I have been a reckless fellow, I know; but I could be wise and careful for *your* sake. I have not much to offer you; but you should have a happy home, if it were a humble one. And I want you, Myra—I want you, terribly. Could you be happy as my wife, dear?"

He tried to put his arm round her, but she drew back.

"You wish me to marry you, Jack?" she said in accents of the deepest surprise. "Oh! I cannot. It is quite impossible."

"Why? Am I too old and grim for you? I am not so hard as I seem, Myra. You have woke up all the tenderness of my nature. I could be lover and friend too."

"Oh, don't speak to me like that," cried Myra, growing deadly pale, her lips quivering. "It is so good of you to care for me. It is such pain to say 'no' to you. There is no one I value so much as you; but——" A pause, while she collected herself for a great effort. "I can *never* be your wife. Forgive me for my ingratitude—my seeming ingratitude—and put me away out of your mind."

"And will you give me no reason?"

"I have none to give, Jack, except——" (a tremulous, miserable little smile) "that I would rather not."

"Enough, Myra. I will not pain you by any further appeal." He turned from her, and paced the room to and fro for a minute. "I have been foolish and hasty," he resumed, pausing beside her. "You were unprepared—you never thought of me as a lover. Yet I have been your lover for months. I was fathoms deep before I knew it. Listen to me, Myra; forget this outburst. I wish to Heaven I had not spoken. For God's sake, let me still be your friend. I shall not again transgress—not, at least, if I see you are of the same mind—but I want to be of use to you. You will not refuse me this pleasure. And who knows?"—smiling—"I may grow strong enough to transplant you into that division of the heart where brotherly affection only flourishes. Myra, you frighten me. You look so awfully white, and—are you sure you are not making some mistake?"

"No," she returned, very low but firmly. "I will never be your wife, Jack."

"Then I will trouble you no more now. I will leave Redworth. I will stay away for a while, to let you forget the pain I have caused you; and when I return we shall be friends, and nothing more, as long as you like. Then we will settle about Paris and—and your studies. So I will

leave you. You'll give me your hand, dear, and trust me as much as ever?"

"I trust you as I never can trust any other creature," exclaimed Myra, bursting into a passion of tears. "Go, dear Jack—do go!" She could endure no more.

He was greatly impressed by her emotion, and even alarmed lest Mrs. Dallas and her son had, by force or fraud, entangled her in some promise or undertaking which had created a barrier between Myra and himself. "She was awfully shaken," he thought. "I don't like leaving her alone."

Pausing at the door, he rang the house bell, and, on the appearance of Keziah, begged her to let Miss Foley know that Miss Dallas was over-fatigued and a little faint, a message which immediately brought the tender-hearted Letitia to her admired young friend.

Myra was, indeed, prostrate. That she should be obliged to put from her lips with her own hand the cup of joy for which her soul was athirst, was the cruelest portion Fate could have allotted her; to be loved and sought by Jack Leyton, and obliged to turn from him; to refuse the joy of spending her life with and for him. But she must be resolute and strong; she must shut her eyes to the heaven which beckoned her.

The words of Mrs. Dallas rang in her ears—"You will never find a man who would knowingly ally himself with the daughter of an unmarried mother." And Jack was a well born gentleman—fastidious, too, in spite of his Bohemianism. He must be ignorant of her mother's sad story, or he would never, never have thought of her as a wife; and she must neither take advantage of that ignorance nor let the true reason of her refusal pass her lips. No; she would be faithful to her dear dead mother, who had always lived in her memory as a sweet saint, whose excellence she must try to emulate.

For this she had hurt Jack. He had looked so cast down; his hand shook when he grasped hers at parting; and she had been obliged to let him go when she longed to throw her arms round his neck and tell him, with tears and kisses, how well she loved him. Her grief was so intense that her tears dried up under its scorching intensity. She

could not endure the well meant but wordy sympathy of the kindly Letitia, and, under the plea of fatigue and a return of her bad headache, she escaped to the shelter and solitude of her own room—not to do battle with her sorrow, but to lie prostrate under its cruel stings till exhaustion brought oblivion.

CHAPTER XXV.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

It was long since Mrs. Dallas felt such serene satisfaction as this paying of what she considered her just debt to Myra afforded her. She had, indeed, paid that ungrateful and unmanageable girl more fully than she expected. She intended to wound her pride and lower her self-esteem. She saw that she had pierced the depths of her heart by the revelation of her mother's shame.

Mrs. Dallas greatly enjoyed the triumph; still, she had not gained the point at which she aimed—not with any high hopes of success, certainly. Myra's whole bearing, her manner of accepting the onslaught made upon her, showed Mrs. Dallas that she had herself torn open a gulf between them which it would be difficult to fill up or bridge over; yet she was more alert and cheerful after this interview than she had been since Myra had escaped from her.

She put on a pretty black dress—the first she had permitted herself to order—of “the mitigated grief” class, and prepared to visit Lady Shirland, who was soon going to leave town for Scotland. It was now near the end of June, and the dowager hated the dregs of the season.

What Dorothea intended to do she did not know; but she could not and would not have her plans spoiled by Dorothea's whims.

“Very glad to see you, Mrs. Dallas,” she exclaimed when that lady made her appearance. “I am afraid you must think me very remiss. I have been going to see you every day, and never could manage it. It has been an overwhelming season, and Dorothea has been more *entêtée* than ever. This new German doctor—who is, or says he is, a baron—has gained such an ascendancy over her that I do not know what may happen. It is really too provoking. Now, do sit down and tell me all your news. You are not

looking particularly well; and I do not wonder, after all the worry you have had with that girl. I tell you what, Mrs. Dallas, you must come down to Glenusquebaugh and spend a nice quiet time with *me*."

"The best restorative you could suggest, dear Lady Shirland. I shall be but too glad to act upon it."

"Well, and what tidings have you of that rather inexplicable niece of yours?"

"She spent the day with me lately, and is properly penitent for her folly. I think she would be glad to return to me. I fancy she has found out that she is really friendless, and suspects there is something not quite right about her antecedents. She has taken refuge with some book-selling women at Redworth. I believe she acts as an assistant there. They are relatives of that Mrs. Keene. If such are her tastes, she had better remain where she is."

"It is curious," remarked Lady Shirland thoughtfully. "And your son?"

"Don't ask," exclaimed Mrs. Dallas passionately. "The mischief that a cold, heartless coquette can do to a fiery, impulsive young man like my Lionel is almost incalculable. He has given up his employment, and is wandering on the Continent—an easy prey to adventurers of both sexes. She has spoiled his life. I am always afraid of what tidings the post may bring of him."

"Try and get him to return to you. Find out a pretty girl with a little money to soothe and flatter him, and he will come all right. After all, that Myra Dallas was an interesting girl, whatever her faults may be. She would have been a wretched match for your son. I never could understand why you agreed to it."

"A mother's weakness," murmured Mrs. Dallas.

"Very great weakness, my dear friend. Pray do you know that Mr. Leyton is staying at Redworth? He is painting a picture for that lucky young fellow, Cecil Forrester; so I suppose your runaway *protégée* and her old friend see a good deal of each other."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, then stopped. "And do *you* know, Lady Shirland, that Captain Forrester has settled an annuity on Miss Dallas—not much, but quite enough to keep her above want?" she added.

"You don't say so! Very nice and honorable of him.

I am delighted to hear it. It must be a relief to your mind; you can conscientiously wash your hands of that troublesome girl now."

"I do not wish to act unkindly or revengefully toward her, Lady Shirland. Even now, if she wanted to return!"

"I should have nothing whatever to do with her," interrupted Lady Shirland promptly. "There is, or there ought to be, a limit to benevolence and forgiveness, and all that sort of thing."

"It is hard to forgive some offenses."

"Of course it is—very hard. O Dorothea"—as the door opened to admit that young lady—"I did not expect you so soon."

"I have only looked in for a moment. My dear Mrs. Dallas—so delighted to see you! I have just been talking to Captain Forrester at the flower show, and he tells me he has made great friends with Myra. Suppose he fell in love with her, and——"

"Suppose the skies fell, and we caught larks," interposed Lady Shirland contemptuously.

"Poor dear mamma has no sentiment or imagination," said Dorothea to Mrs. Dallas with a sweet smile. "I have just looked in, mamma, to say that I have quite made up my mind to go with you to Glenusquebaugh. I think quiet and mountain air will set me up."

"Very well, Dorothea; but I will *not* ask Dr. Von Siedlitz——"

"The baron? Oh, I don't want *him*. It would be better to give quarters to Mr. Leyton. *He* is in town, Mr. Wardlaw has just been telling me, and is going up to Scotland to get some materials for a picture. He is really becoming quite popular. I thought it best to tell you *at once*, mamma. You might, perhaps, let Mr. Leyton know that the scenery of Glenusquebaugh is very fine, and that we could put him up?"

"Yes, Dorothea, I will write this evening. It would be a relief to have one reasonable being in the house."

"It would indeed," said Dorothea with conviction. "Now I must run away—I am due at Lady Edward Chetwynd's. Don't expect to see me till eight o'clock. Good by, Mrs. Dallas. What has become of Mr. Ashby?"

She ran off without waiting for a reply.

"So the baron's day is done," exclaimed Lady Shirland. "I am thankful. She has always a standing fancy for Jack Leyton. I wish he would make up his mind and marry her. What a relief it would be to mine!"

"But, Lady Shirland, hasn't Mr. Leyton led rather a wild life?"

"Perhaps so; but it *has* been lived and done with. He is quite a gentleman; and I should be only too thankful to have Dorothea settled decently and off my hands. I am quite weary of her."

"Under those circumstances——" began Mrs. Dallas, when other visitors were announced.

Mrs. Dallas, however, stayed on; for among them was a certain hypochondriac retired civilian, whom she used to meet years ago in India, and who was highly pleased to renew his acquaintance with her. He was quite interested respecting her son, herself, and her late husband, and finally begged leave to call, which Mrs. Dallas graciously accorded.

She then took leave, and walked home in deep, and on the whole satisfactory thought. Though she had very slight evidence to go upon, she had a strong conviction that it was perhaps a girlish fancy for Leyton which was the chief cause of Myra's aversion for Lionel. Now, if he married Dorothea—which, of course, a needy man like Leyton would be only too glad to do—that would be another well deserved punishment to Myra. If Lionel would only come back and lay siege to Dorothea, and so cut out Leyton, after his virtually encouraging Myra to reject Lionel, while she would be left lamenting, this would be poetical justice after Mrs. Dallas's own heart. Then, when she found she was despised and deserted, Myra might be glad to turn to Lionel after all.

"But it might be too late," mused Mrs. Dallas. "I wish Lionel would return. He is draining me. I fear he plays high. I must nerve myself to resist his demands. He is ungrateful, too. Once he gets over this business he will be more himself, I am sure."

Some friendly *deus* seemed to have heard her wish; for on entering her drawing room, a brown-yellow envelope on the table caught her eye. She hastily opened and read it.

"I will be with you to-morrow morning," it ran, and was signed "Lionel,"

"I am going to be lucky once more," she said to herself as she rang the bell to summon Mrs. Dwyer and give directions respecting her son's room, and order a tempting dinner to welcome him home.

As Lionel did not mention by which route he would travel, his mother spent most of the following day listening for the sound of his arrival. He did not, however, make his appearance till nearly eight o'clock.

"My dear Lionel, you look dreadfully ill," said Mrs. Dallas, kissing him, but not effusively. "Had you a bad passage? You seem to have suffered a good deal."

"Yes, I generally do; but I was rather seedy before I started. I should like some brandy and soda to pick me up before I dress; you must tell me all the news after dinner. How dusty and stuffy London seems!"

Lionel was amiable enough, trying even to be amusing and complimentary—an effort by no means usual with him. He ate little, however, and his mother's keen eye discerned something uneasy and nervous under his assumed gayety. When they were alone, she proceeded to give him an account of Myra's visit, suppressing, however, the most important feature in it—even implying, without committing herself to any distinct statement, that Myra might be induced to return to her aunt's guardianship.

"It seems that Leyton, who mixes himself up in her affairs in an odd way, has been at Redworth on the pretense of painting. From what Myra told me, she appears to have been acting as assistant to these Foleys, who keep a booksellers' and stationers' shop. This brings me to the most curious part of the story. You know Captain Forrester's place, Wickham Hall, is close to Redworth."

"No, I did *not* know."

"Well, it is; and somehow Forrester fell in with Myra—or Leyton, whom he patronizes, drew his attention to her. At all events, he has settled an annuity on her for life—a hundred and fifty or sixty pounds a year, I believe—so that she is independent. I wish you would run down and see her, for Leyton is away, or——"

"What!" interrupted Lionel, who seemed greatly struck; "has Forrester done this of his own free will? Can he have any idea? Does it not look like hedging?"

"No, I am sure not. He is a curious, almost eccentric,

young man, I am told, undisguisedly careful of his own interests, his money, and all that is his. I hear he thinks of standing for West Blandfordshire if Lord Authur Comp-ton accepts the Irish Secretaryship. I don't fancy he is generous, but he wishes to be thought just."

"Mother, you suggest ideas which I have mentioned to you before."

"Put them out of your head, Lionel," said his mother gravely. "They are simple folly."

"All men are vulnerable through self-interest."

"Yes; but there are counteracting influences which you seem unable to understand. I will not listen to you. Tell me by what line you traveled. You arrived at an unusual hour."

"I came by Dieppe."

"Ah; then you had been cleaned out, or you would not have faced the long crossing."

"You are right," he returned, throwing himself back in his chair with a desperate attempt at reckless indifference. "I have just half a crown, a franc and a half, and some coppers in my pocket."

"I expected as much," said Mrs. Dallas, her brows meeting in an angry frown. "Now pray inform me what debts you have left behind."

"I can't," he said, in a more natural manner. "I have been awfully unlucky, and—and—three figures will scarce cover them. However, I have learnt a lesson at last. Clear me this once, mother, and I swear to you I'll never touch a card again. I'll turn over a new leaf, and be guided by you."

Mrs. Dallas did not reply; she kept her eyes fixed on the table, looking the picture of stony indifference.

"Do not refuse to help me," urged Lionel. "I have got a couple of weeks' time to pay up, and the hotel bills are not heavy, if you could pay these first. You will see, I shall become a new man. If I have any luck in marriage or anything, I will repay you, and I swear I will never touch a card again."

"It will be a great benefit to you if you keep this oath, Lionel, but it will not draw any money from me. I told you before I should not again pay your debts—certainly not what are termed debts of honor. I am resolved

not to be persuaded or cajoled. As you got into trouble, so you must get out of it."

Lionel looked in his mother's set face and then, throwing prudence and self-restraint to the winds, burst into a furious tirade against her harshness, penuriousness, selfishness, accusing her of having caused his father's death by her conduct, and many other wild assertions, his fine dark eyes blazing with murderous fury.

Nothing, however, moved her. When, at last, he paused for want of more abusive expressions, she said, in a composed voice:

"If you have not run up an outrageous hotel bill, I will pay it—but nothing else; and nothing shall shake me from my purpose. As you are scarcely sane, I shall leave you to recover yourself; and pray remember that the lock of my despatch box, where I keep my most important papers, is a patent, and if tampered with will tell tales."

"Do you think I want your infernal papers?" screamed Lionel, "I can do without them, as you shall find out;" but his mother left the room without noticing his polite remark. A few minutes after she heard, in the quiet of her own room, the front door shut with a violence which shook the house.

"I must hold to my resolution," she thought, "or I shall be beggared; and then who will help me? Not Lionel! He is selfish; yet I love him. Why would not that girl accept him? She is ruining us both." She turned to the large bureau, and opening it took out her bank-book, and began to make calculations on some half-sheets of note paper, which were neatly stowed away in a side drawer.

The day but one after this scene Captain Forrester was busy writing in his room in a quiet hotel in Dover Street. He had soon tired of his yachting expedition, and returned to worry his solicitor, stock-broker, and the house agent. In fact, the lord of Wickham Manor had the taste and abilities of a man of business; and, except when hunting, shooting, or inspecting the improvements on his estate, he was only happy when rushing about London, driving bargains, and struggling to get the best of everything at the smallest cost. Yet he was not ungenerous; only painfully aware of the value of money. To him entered a waiter,

salver in hand, and on it lay a note and a card. Forrester glanced at the first with a frown—it was from his solicitor, who apologized for not keeping his appointment that morning; then he took the card and read, “Mr. Lionel Ashby.” “Who the deuce is he? I seem to know the name. Hum, ah! I know. Show the gentleman up.”

The next moment Lionel entered. He was exceedingly well dressed, and good-looking, with a winning smile showing a row of dazzlingly white teeth, and had an air of deferential politeness; but the impression he created on Forrester can be best described by that gentleman’s mental question, “Does he want to tempt me to join some bubble company, with his grinning civility?” while he said aloud, looking at the card, “Mr. Ashby, I don’t think I have had the pleasure of meeting you before.”

“No, Captain Forrester, but I think I can prove myself to be a sort of connection.”

“Pray sit down, Mr. Ashby,” rather stiffly.

“Thank you! let me explain. I am the stepson of your relative, Colonel Edward Dallas.”

“Ah! rather a distant relative.”

“Had he lived, Captain Forrester, he would have been a little too near the main line of the family for your interests.”

“I am aware of that,” shortly.

“Returning a couple of days ago from the Continent,” resumed Ashby, “I heard from my mother of your generous consideration for my cousin (as I have always considered her), and I have called to thank you very sincerely. Myra Dallas is a little difficult to deal with; she might have had a happy, comfortable home with my mother if she chose, without troubling you, but——”

“I wonder why the deuce she left it!” ejaculated Forrester, as he paused. “Not that I regret in any way having undertaken to provide for her; she has been rather ill-treated on the whole. Had her father nothing to leave her? You seem to know something of the family affairs.”

“He hadn’t much, but as he died intestate—like your wealthy kinsman, George Dallas—whatever he left went to his brother, my step-father.”

“Ha! that’s the reason Mrs. Dallas took her in. Very kind, I’m sure,” said Forrester, while he thought, “What the

deuce is the young fellow driving at?" and looked openly at the clock.

"Yes, I am keeping you," remarked Lionel in reply to the look. "But you will find I have something to say that is worth your while waiting to hear!"

"Indeed! Pray let me hear it, then."

Lionel smiled. He knew he had a great card to play, yet he felt nervous about playing it; uneasy as to how he could best introduce it, and oppressed by the sledge-hammer directness of Forrester's domineering manner.

"I suppose you did not expect Mr. Dallas would have lied without leaving a will?" he began reflectively.

"I have never thought about it. It never crossed my mind that his money would come to any of us. He could not bear the sight of anyone belonging to him. It was quite an accident, its coming to me."

"No. I suppose if this girl, Myra, had been legitimate, she would have nabbed the fortune."

"No doubt. Hard on her, but good for me; that's one reason why I was willing to provide for her."

"It would be uncommonly awkward if she were to prove illegitimate after all?"

"Yes, deuced inconvenient! but as she isn't there is no use thinking about it."

Lionel laughed—an uneasy, hesitating kind of laugh. "You know nothing is so imminent as the unexpected," he said, with an odd, mocking, malignant look.

"Well, Mr. Ashby, if you have nothing more important to communicate, I am afraid I must leave you, as I have an appointment——"

"No, you must hear me!" exclaimed Lionel, spurred to action. "What I want to say is—well, nothing very pleasant. I—I happen to know that it is quite possible Myra Dallas may be legitimate, but—it's a bit of knowledge I've never told to mortal, and never will, if—if you wish it kept a secret."

"Why, what the deuce do you mean?" cried Forrester, opening his eyes in somewhat contemptuous astonishment. "How could there be any question about her illegitimacy?"

"I assure you there is. It would be a change for you if she were to set up a claim to the Dallas property."

"If you imagine that I should be disturbed by any at-

tempt at imposition, you are very much mistaken. I should carry the war into the enemy's quarters. Pray, who has been putting you up to this folly?"

"No one, Captain Forrester; but I thought it well to warn you, because someone less friendly to you than I am might inform Miss Dallas of her rights and egg her on to attack you."

Forrester laughed scornfully.

"What, in the name of Heaven, has put this rubbish into your head?"

"Because, when I was assisting my mother to regulate the colonel's papers, we came upon a lot of his brother's. I don't fancy the colonel ever looked through them——" He paused.

"Did you find any will?" asked Forrester, with animation.

"Will? No; but—tied up with some old love letters was a certificate of marriage between Frederic Dallas and Myra's mother."

Forrester's face hardened into an expression of contemptuous incredulity.

"She committed bigamy, then. How could she marry when her husband was alive?"

"He was not alive."

"Pray, what is your object in telling me this extraordinary story, Mr. Ashby?"

"I thought you might like to know, that——"

"I would rather *not* know," returned Forrester, with a grim smile; "but as you have opened the subject, I must get to the bottom of it."

"I assure you, Captain Forrester, my object was entirely friendly. Of course, if it were not, I should approach you in a different way, without giving you the chance of making up your mind as to the course you will take, free from any outside pressure, and certain of safety and secrecy."

"Yes, it is uncommonly friendly. I wonder your tendency is not to adopt the young lady's side."

"It is always better to deal, in such matters, with a man than a woman, especially with the man in possession——" and he smiled pleasantly.

"Ha!" ejaculated Forrester, as if something suddenly penetrated to his understanding, and he remained silent for

a moment gazing thoughtfully at Lionel. "I think I see the object of your visit," he said at length. "I think, too, that you and your mother have proved your belief in this rather remarkable story. Now, before I take the trouble of thinking about it you must show me something tangible. I shall then hear what you have to propose. We are both men of the world, and can speak plainly—eh?"—looking keenly at him, a slight smile on his lips.

"Exactly," returned Lionel eagerly. "I saw at once you were a fellow one could speak frankly to."

Forrester's carefully chosen words were an immense relief to him. He had been exceedingly nervous about opening up the subject, while his mother's warning rang in his ears, and he half expected to be kicked out by the stern, curt, matter-of-fact master of Wickham Hall.

"You think so?" replied Forrester abruptly, anxious to draw him out and ascertain how much he knew.

"What do you consider tangible?" returned Lionel.

"Before I enter into the affair with you," said Forrester, "I must see the certificate and the letters you say you have found; besides these, a good deal more is needed before I can admit a doubt as to my rights. I'll not give up easily what I can hold."

"Of course not; you would be a fool if you did. I can only say that if, with a due regard to my own interests, I can help you, I shall gladly."

"You are very good. When may I expect to see the documents you mention?"

Lionel thought for an instant.

"The day after to-morrow, about eleven," he said, uttering a silent prayer that he might be able to get hold of the desired papers, for his mother was a formidable obstacle.

"Good!" returned Forrester, rising. "I shall be here."

"Then for the present I will wish you good-morning," said Lionel, also rising and offering his hand; but Forrester had turned away to ring the bell, and did not seem to see it.

"So much for the English honor and pride my mother talks about," said Lionel to himself as he descended the stair. "I never knew a man rise quicker to the bait than Forrester. He will be glad enough to make things square with me."

“Confounded sneak!” thought Forrester, as he stood looking after his departing visitor. “He is calculating how much he can squeeze out of me for this secret of his. I must get at the truth, though there’s not much in it, probably—there can’t be. It would be an infernal nuisance, though, if it were true; I should be in an awful fix. But there’s no use in anticipating evil. I’ll go and have a talk with Wardlaw about it. He is a devilish long-headed old fellow.”

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CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE MAZE.

WHILE these arbiters of her fate fought a duel of wits, Myra herself thought she had touched the lowest depths of her sad destiny. To turn away from the cup of happiness held to her lips by Leyton was more than she could bear without physical as well as mental suffering. Life with him was such a vision of bliss that the mere thought of it was enough to float her into elysium. But she must resist. Mrs. Dallas was uncompromising in her air of conviction when she asserted that no man—no gentleman—would knowingly wed the daughter of an unmarried mother. Leyton must, therefore, be ignorant of her true position. Of this ignorance she must take no advantage; indeed, she did not feel in the least tempted to do so. To deceive was almost impossible to her, while to explain was even more abhorrent. What! betray the dear father she had so tenderly loved, the mother she had idealized, to the blame, perhaps the contempt, of any living soul! Never! In her innermost heart she was faithful to them. Some error, some fatality for which they were not quite accountable, lay at the root of this wrong-doing; and all she wished was to shield her dear ones from contumely. As she would have given her life for them were they with her, so she would give up happiness to guard their memory.

But the blow cost her dear. She longed to tell Leyton how much she loved him; to excuse herself for the unhappiness she had caused him, though that would not last—he would find so many to love him. But she *would* like him to know that her refusal was not prompted by caprice or indifference.

Rarely has a young, delicate spirit been called upon to endure more cruel agony; and the future had so little hope to offer. She must always be alone.

She must be resolute. Work—even the work she loved,

even the humble independence she had looked forward to—had lost all attraction. Nothing was worth while striving for. Her heart was left to her desolate. Why, why must she live?

She hardly cared to open a letter from Leyton, which reached her a short time after he had gone. It could only bring fresh pain.

I am going for a short time to the Western Highlands [he wrote]. I want to do some sea and coast sketches. I feel I must be up and doing, or— [What followed was scratched out]. When I return it will be time enough to settle your Paris plans; for it is not well to begin studio work before September, and I think you are fairly comfortable where you are. You must still give me the privilege of a guardian, and let me help you—it will be a pleasure for me if I can. Trust me still. I will be your friend, if I can be nothing more, in any way. I am always yours,

J. LEYTON.

This letter ought to have comforted Myra; but it did not. Nothing could just then—she was physically ill.

Trying to sketch one damp day in the ruins—for she did not like Miss Foley to think that she would do nothing now Jack Leyton was gone—she caught a chill, and grew quickly feverish. Her head ached; she could not eat or sleep. For a day or two Miss Letitia strove in vain to rout the enemy with her old-fashioned remedies,—hot gruel at night, herb tea, mustard poultices, etc.,—but in vain.

The principal medical man in Redworth was summoned. He looked very grave, asked many questions, ordered the patient to bed, but gave her two anxious friends no very clear information. Next day the poor young sufferer was wandering in mind, and only recognized at intervals where she was; while another twenty-four hours saw her quite oblivious of everything save confused memories of her early days at Munich; her pulse beat terribly fast, and feverish symptoms rapidly developed.

The fight between youth and disease had begun, and for many days the result was uncertain.

Though when in a state of anger and thoroughly roused, Lionel Ashby threw all fear of his mother, all proper respect for her, to the winds, he was, in his calmer moods, somewhat in awe of her; and had he possessed any means of obtaining the documents of which he boasted the posses-

sion to Forrester, he would unhesitatingly have stolen them. This was impossible. He might have "lifted" the box containing them, but before twelve hours were over Mrs. Dallas would have been on his track.

Making a virtue of necessity, he described, with an air of the greatest frankness, his interview with Forrester, exaggerating the symptoms of his readiness to jump at Lionel's offer of concealment.

She was very angry—even alarmed.

"How dare you do this without my knowledge and consent?" she cried. "You have endangered any chance we had by letting Forrester know the truth. You have put the game in his hands. Without making any bargain with you, he has only to improve the good impression he must already have made on Myra by his generosity and marry her. Then he can snap his fingers at you and enjoy his wealth, untrammelled by blackmail in any shape. You are really a hot-headed idiot, and enough to anger even so foolish mother as I am."

"Thank you," returned Lionel sharply. "I saw the man as well as heard him speak, and I can tell you he is thoroughly shaken. He wants to keep the whole property to himself, and he is ready to pay me my price; but I must prove my position—I must show him the certificates both of marriage and birth, the letters, and——"

"I suppose you may as well. Having begun the foolery, you will have to go on with it; but for Heaven's sake do not give up your papers without an equivalent!"

"Trust me for that, mother!" cried Lionel with alacrity, thankful to have, so far, succeeded.

"And bring them safely back to me. I have a list of them, which I will copy and give to you. I shall only give you a copy of the cutting from the *Times* and the Italian papers, describing the railway accident and the death of the first husband; those must be kept with jealous care; if lost or destroyed it would be very difficult to establish Myra's legitimacy."

"All right, mother. It might be best. What sum ought I to ask for my secret?"

"I don't know. You must feel your way."

"If he intends to keep the affair dark, why it is worth his while to pay heavily."

"It certainly is; but he will be an idiot if he does not secure both the girl and the money without your help."

"We will see," said Lionel with a happy smile.

The result of the next interview between Forrester and Lionel was a prolongation of preliminaries. The former read the various documents with an inscrutable countenance, and in reply to some suggestive remarks from Lionel, asked with brutal abruptness, "Come, tell me at once, how much do you want for this lot?"

"That is not for me to say," said Lionel with an air of polite forbearance. "You know best what these papers are worth to you; and I am sure your sense of justice——"

"Is equal to yours, eh?" interrupted Forrester, looking hard at him with a curious expression. "Well, I will tell you what I consider they are worth to me when I have consulted with my solicitor."

"What!" cried Lionel, aghast. "You are not going to trust such a secret to anyone?"

"If solicitors are not greatly belied," returned Forrester with a grim smile, "they are just the gentry to be trusted with a piece of robbery of this kind!"

"Not a very courteous expression," said Lionel, his face darkening.

"Why? You and I can afford to speak honestly to each other," remarked Forrester dryly.

"You will observe that in this stage of the business I cannot part with these documents," said Lionel.

"No, I do not suppose you will. Now we can have no more to say to each other at present, Mr. Ashby; as soon as I am prepared to say what I shall propose, I'll write to you. Good-morning, Mr. Ashby." Hastily gathering up his documents and thrusting them into a breast pocket, Lionel beat a retreat.

As soon as the door had closed upon his visitor Forrester sat down, and drawing his writing materials to him, made some notes carefully and rapidly. Folding up the sheet of paper on which he had written, he placed it in his note-book, and that in his pocket. Then he wrote a note, "Dear Wardlaw: Dine with me to-day, or let me dine with you. I want to take counsel on various points."

"Send this to Mr. Wardlaw at once, and get me an answer," he said to the man who answered the bell. For-

rester continued to write and make calculations till his valet appeared. "Mr. Wardlaw has gone out of town, sir," he said. "Your note will be forwarded."

"What an infernal nuisance! Call a hansom, I am late." A quick order to the driver, "Lincoln's Inn, sharp!" and he was whirled away to a consultation with his solicitor.

Wardlaw, on receipt of this note, returned to London sooner than he would otherwise have done; nevertheless, it was some little time before Forrester and his ex-guardian met. Then they dined together at the latter's apartments.

"Now, tell me your tale," said Wardlaw, pushing the claret toward his guest when dinner was over and they were alone.

"I begin to fear it is a tragedy for me," returned Cecil, filling his glass. "That young scoundrel, Ashby, turned up again the day I wrote to you, with a packet of papers, which he let me look through, but would not leave in my hands. There was the certificate of a marriage between Frederic Dallas and Angela Cevasco, widow, in October, 1865, at St. Jude's Church, Kensington; another of the birth of a daughter named Myra some months later, cuttings from an Italian paper, describing a bad accident on the line between Genoa and Milan on the 2d of September, 1865, with the names of those killed—among whom was that of Filippo Cevasco, silk and velvet manufacturer, of Genoa; there was a letter or statement from Frederic Dallas, declaring that this Cevasco was the first husband of his wife Angela, who had been obliged to fly from his cruelty, and that immediately on hearing of Cevasco's death, he started from Venice with his wife, for England, for the purpose of having their marriage solemnized and registered. They remained in London till after the birth of their daughter, and then returned to the Continent."

"It looks bad," ejaculated Wardlaw; "but it has yet to be proved that this Cevasco was really the husband of Myra's mother."

"Yes, that is the point. My solicitors have sent an agent to Genoa to ascertain particulars. I believe the house of Cevasco still exists, though it is more than twenty years ago since all this occurred. So far the story bears inspection. The marriage is duly entered in the books of St. Jude's Church. They have found the house where Dallas

lodged and the child was born; and if Cevasco proves to have been the man who married Angela Henne (Henne was the mother's maiden name), why I must hand over my property to my pensioner, Myra Dallas."

"It's deuced hard on you, Cecil, deuced hard. But I suppose it can't be helped."

"No, of course not; but that's a poor consolation."

"How is it that Fred Dallas did not tell his story to his brother?"

"Oh, it seems they had quarreled about Fred's connection with this woman, and had held no communication for sixteen or seventeen years. When, on his way back from India, Colonel Dallas sought out his brother, it was too late; Frederic was at the point of death." Silence succeeded for a few moments when Forrester ceased to speak.

"Then you do not think of resisting the claims of Miss Dallas?"

"No! if the inquiry at Genoa proves the Cevasco killed in that railway accident to have been the first husband of Myra's mother, certainly not. I have a character to lose and I am not particularly anxious to enrich the lawyers. But I hope she will not call on me to refund the money I have spent!"

"What! after the consideration you have shown for her?"

"It all depends on her advisers; she has hardly a will of her own, I fancy. When I know what they have found out in Genoa (if it is favorable to Myra), she ought to have a legal adviser of her own, and prove her rights in a friendly suit. It might save difficulties hereafter."

"Yes, it might," said Wardlaw thoughtfully.

"Perhaps the best and fairest thing to do would be to marry her," resumed Forrester in a candid tone, and with an air of willing self-sacrifice. "She would get a husband—not a bad one, I flatter myself—in addition to a fortune; and she could settle a good slice, or the whole of it, if she likes, on me."

Wardlaw smiled. "She may not fancy you."

"Why? there is nothing to dislike in me. And, do you know, that girl is not a bad sort; I think I could put up with her very well. Eh, what do you think?"

"That you are a wonderful young man," returned Wardlaw with a curious smile.

"Oh, come now, not wonderful! I *have* some sense of right and wrong, and I'm not going to disgrace myself by double-dealing. However, I shall do nothing hastily. As to that fellow, Ashby, I think I'll get Grove to write him an official sort of letter, informing him that I am much obliged for his information, but whether it proves Miss Dallas heir to the wealth of our late relative or not, it puts me in no way under any obligation to him; that he can give or withhold the documents he showed me as he likes, and therefore I can see no necessity for another meeting, which would probably be painful to both parties. That will turn his flank, eh? By Jove, if he comes near me again, I shall kick him downstairs."

"Then I hope he will not! How soon do you expect to hear the result of your mission to Genoa?"

"It is uncertain; perhaps the end of next week. I'll have a deuced uncomfortable time, I can tell you, until I know how matters go. Gad, I've got rid of between eight and nine thousand of the cash, what with one thing and another; if Myra Dallas is advised to demand this money back, I shall be done in earnest! She had much better marry me than ruin me."

"If there is any truth in a face, she will not exact the last farthing."

"Don't you be too sure. It all depends on what sort of an adviser she will get."

There was another pause. Then Wardlaw suddenly asked, "Have you seen Leyton?"

"No, not for a few weeks. Somebody said he was out of town."

"If I were you," resumed Wardlaw, "I should write and ascertain his whereabouts. *He* would be the man to advise Miss Dallas. He is a good man and true, and would be a friend to both of you."

"Very likely, but she had better take me as adviser-in-chief."

"My dear fellow, you are too deeply interested to——"

"What?" interrupted Forrester, "do you mean to say I would not give her disinterested advice, even if she *does* kick me out?"

"Your intentions might be excellent, but the position would be difficult."

"I don't see that. Anyhow, I'll write to Leyton; I suppose his letters are forwarded?"

"I should wait the result of your inquiries at Genoa, and then write."

"Ay! it's as well to keep the affair quiet till I know my ground. It's an infernal business if I am to lose the fortune after so short a spell of it."

"Not if you get it back with interest in the shape of a nice wife."

"Interest? Incumbrance, you mean!" exclaimed Forrester. "I don't want to marry for these ten years. Why the deuce fellows want to run their heads into the matrimonial noose, I cannot tell. However, as I said before, if the worst comes to the worst, I shouldn't object so much to Myra Dallas, and it would be far and away the best mode of settling the matter."

Forrester was as good as his word.

After many days of impatient waiting, rendered still more unpleasant by his mother's gloomy looks and ominous silence, the spell was broken by a thunderbolt, in the shape of a lawyer's letter, embodying the ideas sketched by Forrester in his talk with Wardlaw; while to Ashby's eyes the word "Defeat" seemed blazoned all over it in letters of fire.

He opened it at breakfast, and could not suppress the word "Damnation!" uttered with a kind of despairing yell.

A hasty demand for explanation from Mrs. Dallas was answered by a frantic outburst of despair and fury; while he walked the room, throwing himself upon the sofa, only to start up again and resume his pacing to and fro.

His mother picked up the letter he had flung from him, and read it with a bitter smile.

"You have reaped a rich harvest from your contempt of my counsels," she said.

"Don't!" he cried, pausing opposite to her, a dangerous look in his flaming eyes, "I am half mad already. Don't drive me to—to hurt you."

She was silent, and began to reperuse the letter, while her son raved.

"The cowardly, lying cur," he cried, "to lead me on, to cheat me, and then dare to face me! He has cheated me

of my information, and flung me away when he squeezed me dry. Is that an English gentleman's sense of honor? Is that the high principle *you* talk about?"

"He does not consider himself bound to you in any way. Oh, Lionel, I wish to Heaven you had listened to me, and not acted with such fatal precipitation. You have only enriched that miserable, ungrateful girl, who will make a mock of you. Oh, my son, bad, unkind as you have been, I cannot help feeling for you—I cannot bear to see you beaten. Turn to me now—I will help you. It will be a tremendous effort to re-establish ourselves, our characters, after such a failure as this—for of course I shall be classed with you—but I see a ray of light, and I will help you."

She paused, unable to command her voice, her heart beating with deadly hatred for Myra, rage against Forrester, despair at the false step taken by Lionel, and suddenly awakened compassion for him.

"There is no one like you, after all, mother," exclaimed Lionel, throwing his arms round her. "I was a fool to go against you; but help me now and I will stick to you. Help me to revenge."

"Let us make our own position secure first," she replied, kissing him with unusual warmth. "The rest may come after. Try and be calm and resolute. Sit down—take a cup of coffee while I think."

"I couldn't swallow it without a dash of cognac."

Mrs. Dallas went to the sideboard and took out the desired addition; and, sitting down, poured out coffee for her son and for herself, though she added milk only to hers. She was very silent for some minutes; then she rang, and, while the servant cleared away, seemed absorbed in the morning paper.

"Now, listen to me, Lionel," she exclaimed when they were alone. "Sit down and gather your senses together. I presume you gave Forrester to understand that you did not mean to give him the proofs of Myra's legitimacy for nothing?"

"Yes; of course I did."

"You were quite alone with him?"

"Quite alone, both times."

"Very well—one man's word is as good as another's. We must tell our tale resolutely and consistently. Here it

is: First, we have only just found these documents suggesting Myra's legitimacy. My husband's papers were so voluminous that I naturally postponed looking through those belonging to my brother-in-law till the other day. Then, being deeply interested in Myra, you, in a fit of generous enthusiasm, imprudently went off to Forrester, hoping to talk him into restoring the property to Myra or dividing it with her, thus avoiding the cost of a lawsuit and much unpleasantness. Next you must write a temperate, high-toned letter to these lawyers, protesting against their insinuation that you expected anything for your information, and recapitulating the motives I have set forth. You shall express your astonishment that Captain Forrester—himself an honorable man—should have strangely misinterpreted you. We will get this story well into our heads and stick to it. We must never use any word but 'misrepresentation,' but we can so use it that it may spell 'lie.' Believe me, if you can raise a sufficient dust of indistinctness, and are safe from corroborating witnesses, you may defy 'the powers that be' to prove anything. Some will swear by Forrester, and some by us. But no one can know; and we have as good a right to be heard and believed as our antagonists. Now do you see the game?"

"Yes, perfectly. Then, when quite re-established, we can see what we can do to pay out Myra. I hate her! How I hate her! I wish I had her in my grasp. By the way, mother, do you think there is any chance that the fellow we sent to Genoa may peach?"

"No—none. He scarcely knew anything as to why I wanted the information, and was a commonplace creature. Now, Lionel, get your writing things. The letter to these lawyers requires infinite care. I am a little undecided whether I shall write to Lady Shirland or wait till I go down to Glenusquebagh next week. [A pause.] I think I will write. She will be enchanted with the gossip, and there is nothing like having the first word. Then I shall say a good deal about you, and— Stay. Send a judicious little note yourself to Dorothea. Say that you are in despair at being left alone here; and Forrester has behaved in a most extraordinary manner—it is best to begin it; that you know *she* was interested in Myra, and through Myra in you. Talk of your value for her opinion, and ask for a

l of sympathy. You might mention, too, that you hear
on has returned to town; then perhaps you will get an
ation to take his place. If you do, hold it fast; for
thea is far gone about him, and may be caught in the
ind. Come! let us ravel this web of circumstances till
ving soul can disentangle it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONVALESCENCE.

Is it necessary to trouble the reader with the minutiae respecting the steps taken to ascertain the truth on these points which must be proved in a case of disputed succession? No; they are but a weariness of the flesh. We will, then, only say that the inquiries respecting the history of Filipo Cevalco identified him as the first husband of Myra's mother, to the infinite chagrin of Forrester.

Affairs having progressed so far, there was a pause, a hesitation, as to the next step to be taken.

"I don't care to break the news to the young heiress till I see Leyton," said Forrester one morning to Wardlaw, who had dropped in just to find out how things were going on.

"You have not written to him, I suppose?"

"Yes, two or three days ago, and I am surprised at having no reply."

"He is away in some inaccessible region on the west coast of Scotland, where the postman is unknown."

"Is such a spot to be found nowadays?"

"Yes, occasionally. Have you heard anything of young Ashby?"

"Only from Grove, my solicitor, to whom he wrote in reply to their letter. Right cleverly he replied, I can tell you. He had the impudence to say that I entirely misunderstood him; that he never had the slightest intention of putting a price on his information; nothing, in short, was farther from his thoughts. He had come to me, on the discovery of the certificate, merely because knowing me to be an honorable man, he hoped to bring about a friendly settlement of the affair, and to save the cost of legal proceedings. He could not have taken a better line. It's not my business to denounce him as a double-dealing

Scoundrel. He'll never presume to cross my path again, so I'll let him go; but——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of Leyton, who came in hastily and unannounced, looking haggard and ill.

"Leyton!" cried both men together.

"You have had my letter!" added Forrester.

"Yes, just as I was starting, and read it on the road. This is a strange story of yours; yet I have sometimes thought that some such condition of things existed, or Mrs. Dallas would not have urged such a marriage for her son. Now it remains to be seen if this poor young creature will live to enjoy her unexpected fortune. She has had a bad fever, the brain greatly affected, and is still so prostrate that she cannot be considered out of danger."

"That's a bad business," said Forrester very gravely.

"Bad enough," returned Leyton; "and the stupid people she is with never let me know till almost too late. Then they wrote to me in London, and so lost nearly thirty-six hours. I started the moment I heard, but I was five hours north from Glasgow, so I did not reach Redworth till late yesterday."

"Then Miss Dallas is still at Redworth?" put in Wardlaw.

"She is, and well cared for, I believe. The doctor says if her strength can be kept up she will pull through, but it is still touch and go."

"I trust in God she will!" cried Forrester heartily, "even though she lives to beggar me. It would be too melancholy to think of such a bright young creature passing away with good fortune within her grasp. By Jove, I hope she'll live to marry me. That will be the best solution of the difficulty, eh, Leyton?"

Leyton started and flashed a look of angry surprise at him. "For you—certainly," he said.

"She has youth on her side, and you say good care, so we have every right to hope for the best," observed Wardlaw, who had been watching Leyton; and said to himself, "He is hard hit, poor fellow!"

Leyton kept silence, while Forrester plunged into a description of his interviews with Lionel Ashby, of his hunt for the history of Cevasco, of the undoubted proofs of Myra's legitimacy, etc. Then the conversation naturally turned

on the probable eventualities of the startling discovery.

"Of one thing I am quite sure," said Leyton, at length. "Myra Dallas will never take all from you. She is deeply grateful for the consideration you have shown for her."

"That will depend on her advisers," returned Forrester. "She is an infant, and powerless at present; and she may marry, and her husband will not think much of me or what I have done for his wife."

"Yes," added Wardlaw; "and as soon as her story gets out she will have all the fortune-hunters in London after her."

Leyton muttered something which the others did not catch.

"Well," said Forrester, with a self-satisfied air, "I will do my best to forestall them."

"Nothing can be done at present," said Leyton. "It will be a considerable time before Miss Dallas can be troubled with any matter of business, and long before she can bear any shock. In the mean time it will be well to select a good legal adviser for her. Being a minor, she can do nothing herself."

"Quite true," returned Wardlaw. "Still, her wishes as regards this large inheritance must be consulted."

"Certainly," exclaimed Forrester. "By the way, where are you staying, Leyton?"

"Oh, I shall not leave Redworth till I know that Miss Dallas is safe."

"By the way, how old is she?"

"I have an idea she was twenty in May, but I do not think she knows exactly herself."

"A year to wait for her majority; a great deal may happen in a year," said Forrester thoughtfully. "Then there is no use in asking you to dinner?"

"No, thank you. I have one or two places to call at, and then I shall return to Redworth; so I will say good-morning."

"Good-morning! very glad you are within reach. I am thinking of running down to Wickham myself. You'll let me have a line to-morrow, to say how my cousin is going on?"

"Without fail," returned Leyton with a cynical smile at this sudden recognition of Myra's relationship.

"Good-by, my dear fellow; my best wishes for the recovery of your ward, as I am sure she will consider herself," from Wardlaw.

Leyton walked rapidly away, greatly disturbed in mind. His journey south had been a terrible trial. The idea of Myra dying, breathing her last perhaps before he could catch one look of recognition from her haunting eyes, one last faint smile from her sweet, sad mouth! and she would want him in that supreme moment, he felt—he knew she would. There was some barrier which he did not recognize between them, for there was no indifference in the voice which uttered her denial of his suit; two or three weeks ago she had been so unaffectedly happy to be with him, yet might not that indicate sisterly feeling only? How frank and natural she was! how infinitely interesting from her loneliness, and the strain of tender resignation which was the dominant chord of her character. And now—was death to rob him of his beloved bride, for whom his soul yearned? if—if only he could see her, could assure himself of her condition with his own eyes!

If she escaped—if she were restored to life and health, how would it be? Could he, a poor painter, with a past far from irreproachable, venture to ask an heiress, a woman above him in riches and in character to turn from the prosperous suitors who would, no doubt, flock round her, and wed poverty and obscurity? No, honor forbade! He was the most unfortunate devil on the face of the earth. If Myra had but accepted him when she was poor, obscure, with the stigma of illegitimacy on her birth, all might have been well; but she had said, "No!" He must not deceive himself; she had some strong objection to him, or she would not have declined to share his home. Yet how was he to account for her extraordinary despondency? This was, the doctor told him, the greatest obstacle to Myra's recovery. "She does not seem to care for life," he said. "It is a very bad symptom." Pondering deeply this unyouthful tendency, an idea suggested itself to Leyton, which seized his imagination so forcibly that he paused in the crowded street to look at it with steadfast mental eyes.

"I'll go and speak to Mrs. Keene; she may help me to

unravel the mystery." He called a hansom, and was soon bowling along to Keene's Hotel.

"Dear, dear! Is it you, Mr. Leyton?" cried the good landlady. "I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Keene! I wish you would tell me why you did not send for me sooner. Illness! Why, good God! Miss Dallas might have died before I could come back!"

"Well, sir, it was a bit of a mistake. You see, my poor sisters, who were just broken-hearted about her, they did know as how you were her guardian in a manner of speaking, and I thought they had written; and I was so taken up and worried about the dear young lady I lost my head a bit; but I got her a trained nurse and everything I could——"

"Yes, I know you did, and I am here in time, thank God! Now I want to consult you about an idea that has occurred to me. The last day she—Miss Dallas—was here, how did she seem?"

"Just like a dazed creature that could hardly keep its feet. It's my belief that the aunt said something terribly cruel to her."

"Exactly so. Did you ever know, or hear there were doubts that—that Mr. and Mrs. Dallas were married?"

"No, sir, but Keene did. He told me, and not a word has ever passed my lips; I don't and won't believe the cruel story. If ever there was an angel on this earth, it was Miss Myra's mother."

"Well, Mrs. Keene, she was much more sinned against than sinning, and there is no doubt she was legally and religiously married a considerable time before Miss Dallas was born—a very important matter, as you will hear later on. Now I am disposed to think that as a revenge, Mrs. Dallas told Myra of her illegitimacy, and convinced her of it in some way. This blow was too much for a delicate, refined girl with a tender memory of her parents, and may account for the terrible depression by which her recovery is retarded."

"Gracious, goodness, Mr. Leyton! I am sure you are right! I shall never forget the misery of her face that day when she walked in here looking fit to drop, and just fell

on that sofa. If ever there was a cruel, scheming devil, it's Mrs. Dallas—and what shall we do now, sir?"

Leyton was silent. Indeed, he hardly heard Mrs. Keene; he was asking himself if this could be the reason of Myra's rejection of himself. If so, why there were possibilities of infinite happiness still before him, only—this dreadful fortune would come between them, must come between them!

"I was saying, sir," resumed Mrs. Keene, who had been watching him with interest, "what's to be done now?"

"Eh, what's to be done?" repeated Leyton, looking up. "I scarcely know. The great thing would be to convince her that her mother was all right; she needn't know the exact story. Look here, Mrs. Keene, *you* would be just the right person to tell her. It's a subject *I* dare not open up to her. Will you undertake it, as soon as she is strong enough to bear being talked to?"

"Ay, that I will. She must have suffered terribly. What a hard life she has had, poor dear, and all from the faults of others."

Leyton muttered something, and took a turn to and fro.

"Yes," he said, resuming his seat—"that's the plan. You tell her it was a base lie on the part of Mrs. Dallas; then, when she is able to see me, I'll tell her of the great change in her fortunes; for the proof of her legitimacy makes her an heiress."

"You don't say so, Mr. Leyton! An heiress? Why, how is that, sir?"

Leyton gave her a hasty explanation, at which the good woman's eyes danced with joy.

"Don't talk about this at present, if you please, Mrs. Keene. It will be blazoned about soon enough if—if Myra recovers. I am so infinitely obliged to you for sending down a good nurse. Your sister says she has been of the greatest use. I will write to-night, or telegraph to-morrow morning, or as soon as the doctor thinks Miss Dallas may be spoken to on such a matter. He told me he thought she must have had a severe nervous shock. By Heaven! if we are right in our surmises, I'll give that Mrs. Dallas a piece of my mind before I have done with her."

"You may depend on my prudence, sir. Not a word shall pass my lips—not even to Wilhelmina or grandfather,"

"I am sure I can depend on you, Mrs. Keene," returned Leyton, rising. "You shall hear from me with a full report of our sufferer to-morrow morning."

After a cordial "Good-by" Leyton departed.

Youth and an untried constitution were too much for the foe—a somewhat complicated attack of fever.

Myra slowly rallied, and some days after Leyton's visit to Mrs. Keene, he was permitted to summon that true friend to try the experiment from which they both hoped so much.

"Thank God, she has had two good nights; and Miss Foley reports her much improved in consequence," said Leyton, who met Mrs. Keene at the railway station. "But I am sure I need not warn you to be cautious in approaching the subject. If, however, I am right in my conjecture that she is brooding over the story told her by Mrs. Dallas, the relief of knowing it to be false will be enormous."

On reaching Miss Foley's establishment, the devoted Letitia, who was as constant in her attentions to the invalid as if she had no other nurse, took possession of her sister, who, declining any refreshment, was taken upstairs at once.

"Oh, my dear," whispered Letitia, pausing half way, "it has been an awful time. One night I thought she would never see morning, poor dear. She was wandering; and all her talk was of Mr. Leyton."

"'Don't let Jack come back,' she would say. 'He is better away. He doesn't know; and he must never know.' And then she'd think she was in Germany, and talk a lot I couldn't understand—German, I suppose. Now she is more herself. She said one day—'Why—why did you bring me back to life; I have nothing to live for—nothing.'"

Then, lowering her voice, Letitia continued:

"It's my belief they've had an awful quarrel. I am sure he's in love with her, if she is not in love with him. He did go on at sister and me for not sending for him before. Now, you stay here a minute till I see if she is ready to see you."

The tears would come when Mrs. Keene looked at the pale face, the large blue eyes—larger than they ever looked before—that sought hers with such imploring sadness. The slight form scarcely showed beneath the bedclothes, and

one nearly transparent, white hand lay upon the counterpane. The room was beautifully neat, and a vase of flowers stood upon the chimney-piece. A stout, elderly, sensible looking woman sat by the window, some needlework in her hands.

"My dear," said Mrs. Keene softly, "I am thankful to be let see you again."

"Oh, I have wanted you so much," murmured Myra, making a feeble effort to draw her down and kiss her. "You will stay a little now?"

"Aye, that I will," taking the chair brought forward by the nurse and leaving her hand in the weak grasp of both Myra's.

The nurse took her work and left the room. "But I have been to see you more than once, my dear."

"Have you? Yes—I think I remember."

"And you are feeling a little better—a little stronger?"

"I am." A deep sigh. "I shall live for ever so many years now."

"That's right."

"No; is isn't right, dear Mrs. Keene. I have nothing to live for."

"Yes, you have—if you but knew all; and I have come down to tell you."

"Ah!"—with a deep sigh—"I know all; and that is why I am too weary to care for life."

"Just see, my dearie, what good, kind friends you have. There's my sister regular doting on you; and me, and Captain Forrester, and that good Mr. Leyton come back all the way from Scotland to watch over you——"

"Hush!" whispered Myra, and turned her face away.

"Tell me, missee, do you think you could answer a few questions if I ask them?"

"Yes, I am much stronger."

"Well, my dear young lady, would you mind telling me what it was Mrs. Dallas said to you—the day you went to see her—that upset you?"

"No, not that; anything but that," returned Myra, her pale cheeks flushing.

"If I tell you what I think it was, will you say whether I am right or wrong?"

"I will; but you will never guess."

"I'll try. Did she tell you a horrid lie about your father and mother not being properly married?"

"She told me that; but, alas! it was no lie!" returned Myra, the big tears rolling down her white face.

"It was!" cried Mrs. Keene vehemently. "They were *not* rightly married at the first going off, but afterward they were married as close and true as the queen herself! You were not born for a good while after! It's proved, my dear, and you are going to get a large fortune because your parents were married!"

"Is this true? Oh, if it were! but I dare not believe it. It is too—too good to be true."

"It is real truth, and you'll know it is when you are able to get up and hear all about the fortune that is coming to you. Your blessed mother was married to your father in St. Jude's Church, Kensington, and you were baptized there about a year after; and when you are able to get up and travel, you shall come with me, and see it with your own eyes!"

"I shall see it with my own eyes? you—you promise me this?" cried Myra, with such a lightening up of her face, such a sudden strong effort to sit up, that Mrs. Keene was frightened at the effect of her own words.

"Oh! missee, dear, do lie down, and comfort your heart! You can look the world in the face, and take your stand as Miss Dallas. No one can gainsay it."

Myra sank back on the pillow, and covered her eyes with her hand; her lips moved as if in prayer, and there were a few moments of profound silence.

Then she raised her arms inviting an embrace, which was most cordially bestowed.

"Who told you?" she whispered, still clinging to Mrs. Keene's neck.

"Mr. Leyton."

"And was it the first of it he knew?"

"To be sure it was! Do you think he would have kept such news to himself a minute longer than he could help?"

Myra smiled and bent her head. She did not quite take in Mrs. Keene's meaning; she understood from her friend's speech that Leyton had thought—always thought her legitimate, and had heard of the doubt, the solution, and

the strange chance of her (Myra) having inherited a fortune at the same moment.

"Now, missee, my dear, you must have some nourishment; and try to get a little sleep, for I am afraid I have upset you with all this talk."

"You have given me new life, dear Mrs. Keene! but I will do whatever you desire. I want to get well quick—very quick. Tell me, when did you see Mr. Leyton?"

"This morning, just before I came up to you!"

"What! is he here?"

"Yes, to be sure he is, poor dear gentleman! He was just raging with us all for not letting him know sooner how ill you were."

"He is very kind and good," murmured Myra, and closed her eyes.

Mrs. Keene rang for the nurse, who brought the patient's beef-tea. Then the bearer of these good tidings of great joy slipped quietly away, nurse took her needlework, and Myra closed her eyes, and gave herself up to such visions of coming bliss as have rarely chased away the black despondency of a despairing heart.

If Leyton loved her, as he said he did, there was no obstacle to their happiness. If, instead of being an encumbrance and a disgrace, she was of unstained birth, and sufficiently provided for—her belief in the story of "a fortune" was very limited—what joy to share Jack Leyton's life and be more a help than a hindrance! should she see him soon? and read in his eyes the delicious assurance that she was dear to him? To Myra's nature love was a positive necessity; without it, wealth and power and magnificence would have meant starvation, and for five long years her heart had been dying by inches! God was too good, too bountiful to her; how could she ever show sufficient gratitude for all the benefits he had poured upon her? No thought of herself, of her own deserving or undeserving, crossed her mind; she never troubled about herself. So she passed from these heavenly dreams into profound and balmy sleep.

The old doctor, who had shown profound interest in his patient, found her wonderfully improved next day.

"Why, young lady," he said, when he had felt her pulse and looked at her tongue, "you've been imbibing some elixir of life. You are pounds better this morning."

"Yes!" she returned with a smile so sweet and bright that the doctor remembered it for many a day. "I have had such good news!"

"I should say you had. Well, Miss Foley," to the devoted Letitia, "if this improvement continues, she may get up and lie on the sofa here to-morrow, and perhaps be carried down to the drawing room the day after. I am always anxious to get my patients out of their sick room. Good-morning, my dear! take plenty of nourishment, and keep very quiet."

"She is rallying much quicker than I expected," he continued as he descended the stairs, followed obsequiously by Letitia. "She is not what you call robust, but she has a capital constitution. Don't let her hear any bad news if you can help it; some nervous shock laid her low, another one might finish her. I'll be here 10.30 to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

YES OR NO.

WHEN at last the doctor informed Leyton that there was no reason why he should not see and converse with Myra, the ardently wished for permission caused him as much disturbance as pleasure. How would she receive him? How would she look at him? He fancied he should be able to see at a glance whether her refusal had been prompted by a too sensitive consciousness of her position or a real objection to become his wife. In either case he was in a cleft stick. If she wished to dismiss him finally, he could hardly act as her adviser—intercourse with her would be too painful. If she had a secret liking for him, he must hold back; he must not entangle her in an engagement which would be considered detrimental by most sensible people. She ought to have time to realize her own position and judge between his and the various offers which, no doubt, would be made to her. But above all these considerations towered the engrossing thought—"To-morrow I shall see her. I shall look into her eyes and hold her hand in mine."

It was a fine, cloudless, warm day—but warm with a dry, healthy heat—when Leyton was ushered into Myra's presence. She was almost reclining in an easy chair, and wore a pretty morning-gown of lilac and white; a lilac ribbon passed round her head helped to keep up the loose mass of her hair, which he was thankful to see had been spared. Her eyes looked larger than formerly; she seemed transparently pale and fair, while her naturally slight form appeared too frail to be touched. The delicate color rose in her cheeks as she held out a thin hand to him without a word. He, too, found it hard to speak as he took and kissed it reverently.

"I hardly hoped to find you so well," he said huskily. "I trust my coming will not be too much for you?"

"It will do me good," she returned in a low, weak voice,

as she leant back languidly. "I wanted so much to see you—to thank you."

She smiled kindly, but did not raise her eyes.

"You have nothing to thank me for, Myra. The good fortune which has come to you has come through your enemy or lover—they are sometimes convertible terms—Ashby. He discovered some papers which proved the legality of your father and mother's marriage. There had been some doubts about this," he added hurriedly, anxious to spare her pain and avoid her questions. "I am not sure that Ashby had your welfare at heart in the matter; but, at all events, he told the tale to Forrester, who made all necessary inquiries, the upshot of which is that you are really the heir of Old George Dallas, and Forrester will have to hand over the fortune to you."

"What!" exclaimed Myra, "and that beautiful place?"

"No; not Wickham Hall—that's his own. But he must refund the sums he has spent upon it."

"Then he will not have much money?"

"If you insist on his paying back the money he has spent he will be beggared."

"Jack,"—raising herself in her chair—"do you think I would do this?"

"Well, no; but, Myra, you must do nothing without proper legal advice. We have found you a most respectable adviser, and, as soon as you are able to see him, you will explain your wishes, and things can be formally arranged."

"But can't *you* advise me?"

"Not in a matter of this kind. Moreover, you are, or must be, made a ward in Chancery, and can do nothing till you are of age."

"Until I am twenty-one? That is for a year. I was twenty in May or June—I am not sure. Hedwig always gave me flowers in June; but my father said I was born in May. A year will go quickly; then I will not take all this money from Captain Forrester, who was so good to me when I had nothing. He has been accustomed to riches, and needs riches; I have always been poor, and I do not want this kind of wealth. Would *you* like me to rob Captain Forrester of everything?"

"Well, no, Myra. He is an extremely honorable, straight-

forward fellow; but you must do nothing quixotic—nothing without the lawyer's advice."

"Do you think I want to give him the whole? No, indeed—only part. If it were but to prove my rights, about which I am very jealous, I shall keep some. And oh, how wonderful it all seems! Are you quite well, Jack? You look pale, and your eyes are sad. You must not be ill as I was. I nearly died—I knew it. I could not move; but I knew they were all crying round me."

"Hush!" exclaimed Leyton with a quick gesture of the hand, "I cannot bear it."

"Oh! but *I* was glad. I thought that all the pain and bitterness was nearly over; that I was going where there was what I never could find on earth—a place for me." She stopped; for Leyton turned away and covered his face with his hand for a moment. "But"—with a change of voice—"I want to live now; I want to get well quick—quicker; to go out and see the dear sun—the lovely, beautiful earth."

"God grant you many bright, happy days," said Leyton, recovering himself. "Now, am I not staying too long? You are looking flushed; your eyes are too bright; I am tiring you."

"Oh, no, no! Jack, dear Jack, *I* have something to tell you—something to show you." She drew a letter from her pocket, and gave it to him adding, "It is from Mrs. Dallas."

"What has she to say for herself?"

MY DEAR MYRA—[he began].

"No, no! do not read it aloud," she exclaimed. Leyton obeyed.

I address you in consequence [the letter proceeded] of the extraordinary facts which have just come to light, and fearing that the inimical feeling which (Heaven only knows why) appears to have developed in your mind toward my son and myself might lead you misconstrue circumstances: Having had so much to distress me in that sad task of regulating and perusing my dear husband's letters and papers, I naturally postponed the examination of your father's, partly with the intention of consigning them to your care when you came of age. Lionel, however, thought that this might be a painful ordeal for you, and at his suggestion I permitted him to look through them. You will by this time have heard the result. With the best mo-

he carried the proofs of your legitimacy to the man who has usurped your place, again hoping to spare you, while he made some terms satisfactory to both parties. He has had his reward in the insults heaped upon him, which will, no doubt, rebound on those whose incapacity to understand his disinterestedness prompted their conduct. I now write to say that a small sum of about £3000, the wreck of your father's capital, naturally fell into his brother's possession, your claim not being supposed to exist. I am anxious to restore this sum to you, and beg you will give me instructions as to whom I can remit it. Had I had the least idea of the real state of affairs, it should have been yours long ago. Looking for your reply, I am, yours faithfully,
JUDITH DALLAS.

"Good Heavens!" cried Leyton, when he had finished this epistle. "That woman lies like truth."

"Then you do not believe her?" asked Myra.

"Do you?"

"Well, no, Jack, I cannot. Yet I would not act harshly toward her. You know she was kind to me when I was staying in her house; and in trying to marry me to her son, she did not think or know she was cruel, so——"

"My dear Myra! do you mean to say that you would let her keep the fruits of her robbery? She robbed you of this money, and only offered you a wretched pittance to fence her own baseness! You must not be weak. You may be very sure your uncle—who ought to have secured you by will—left some injunctions as to providing for you. No! in this matter you must be guided by the advice of your solicitor."

"Well, Jack, I will listen to what you and he say."

"Thank you, Myra; believe me, you will not regret it. Another matter must be attended to at once; we must find a suitable residence for you as soon as you are able to move. I dare say you would rather stay with these good souls, but I fear it would not do."

"I shall do as you advise, Jack," she murmured; she was growing very tired.

"I see you are done up, and I will go. I must run up to town to-morrow, both on your account and my own."

"You are too good to me," she said softly, and half put out her hand, but was drawing it back, when Leyton took it gently and held it. How delightful it was to feel the clasp of his!

"You know I ask nothing better than to serve you," he returned, with something of sad composure in his voice.

"I shall write and let you know what we are doing for you, as I shall not return for two or three days. Now I must not stay any longer. By the by, Forrester, who is staying down here, wishes to see you as soon as you can receive him!"

"I should like to see him. He may come the day after to-morrow; if I feel weaker I can put him off. Let him come about three; I shall have had a little sleep then."

"Very well. Good-by, then, my dear ward! You must look on me still as your guardian." He kissed the hand he still held.

"Come back soon!" murmured Myra, the tears gathering in her eyes; she would have kept him if she could. Why was he so gently composed? why had he so changed from the impassioned lover to the quiet, considerate friend? Did he think she had refused to be his wife because she did not love him? Was true, real happiness about to slip from her grasp, and leave her only the dust and ashes of fortune and position?

"Dear, dear Miss Myra; this will never do!" cried Letitia when she came in a few minutes after; "you'll make yourself ill crying like that! Why, whatever can a nice gentleman like Mr. Leyton have said to vex you?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing. He is far too kind and good to vex me; but I am tired and upset, though thankful, too; do not mind me, dear friend."

"Here, let me bathe your head with a little eau de cologne and water; there's nothing like it for the headache, and then you shall have your dinner—a nice roast chicken. I have made the bread sauce myself; and *such* a basket of strawberries has come from Wickham Hall with Captain Forrester's compliments. Now don't cry any more, there's a dear."

In Myra's weak state emotion of any kind was extremely injurious, and the doctor was quite disappointed to find her both weaker and more feverish after Leyton's visit. Captain Forrester was strictly forbidden for some days, until, in short, the patient had again rallied.

Her improvement was largely assisted by letters from Leyton, who also sent books and periodicals, from which Miss Letitia read aloud for the amusement of her charge.

At length a time was appointed for the interview with

Captain Forrester. Myra was anxious to see him, and eager to assure him that she was most desirous he should not trouble himself about the sums he had already disposed of, as she would never claim them.

Leyton was kept in town rather longer than he anticipated, and was still absent when Forrester presented himself. Myra was now able to move about the room without assistance, and rose to receive her visitor.

"Don't! I beg you won't!" was his first exclamation as he entered—well dressed, well groomed, fresh and sandy-colored, with his usual air of sharp importance. "If you move about, you'll just upset yourself; and there will be an end of our talk."

"I am stronger than you imagine," replied Myra with a pleasant smile, and giving him her hand.

"Deuce good teeth!" was his mental comment. His observation was on the *qui vive*, as if he were buying a horse, in view of his intended proposal. "Glad to hear it, I'm sure. You've been pretty bad, I believe? I can tell you I've been quite uneasy about you, though you *are* going to do me out of a fortune," said Forrester.

"Oh, no—not the whole of it," cried Myra, coloring vividly. "I am quite glad to have an opportunity of speaking to you about it. You do not suppose I could forget your kindness, your generosity to me. I should like to keep some of the fortune, for it is very nice to have money."

"I believe you," heartily. "It's the devil to be without it. Now, if this is your view of the matter, why, things will arrange themselves. However, I did not come here to talk of business to you; that would be mean on my part—you'd give in too much. No; we'll let the lawyers fight it out. Tell me, what are you going to do when you are able to leave this?"

"I do not know. Mr. Leyton was to consult with the lawyer about finding a home for me."

"Leyton, eh? I wish you would leave it to me."

"Thank you, very much; but, you see, I have known Jack Leyton since I was a little girl."

"Ay, he has the pull there," said Forrester, as if to himself. "Well, we must find you a nice place—nothing ordinary. I'll talk to a cousin of mine—Lady Mary de

Vesci. She is a tremendous card about schools and missionaries and distressed gentlewomen—double X as to respectability and that sort of thing. Then you must look out for the fortune-hunters. They'll be after you like a flock of vultures, by Jove! Oh, you need not be frightened;" —laughing at the startled look which came into Myra's eyes—"you hold on to me, and I'll see you through."

There was a pause. Myra leaned back with an air of graceful languor, one white, delicate hand resting on the arm of her chair. Forrester's keen light eyes dwelt on her with much satisfaction.

"Nice compact figure—looks like a gentlewoman into the bargain. I might do worse."

With all his faith in himself Forrester grew nervous.

"It will be deuced annoying if she sheds tears of joy when I ask her; and one can see she's weak. I can't do the sentimental lover, and make an ass of myself." He rose, and looked at one or two of Myra's drawings, which were on the wall near the mantelpiece. "I think I can see a way out of this difficulty about a residence. Suppose you come and live at Wickham Hall—eh?"

"At your house!" cried Myra, greatly astonished. "Why, what would your double X respectable cousin say to that?"

"Well caught! She could have nothing to say against it. I ask you to come as mistress of the house—as my wife. Now, there—there's no mistake about it. You see, it would save all bother and injustice. Then we'd share the fortune—you should have a right good settlement, and we'd live happy ever after. What do you say?"

This amazing speech made Myra literally and metaphysically "sit up." She grasped an arm of her chair in each hand, and an amused look made her eyes sparkle.

"What!" she exclaimed, "is it so hard to part with the fortune that you would even marry *me* rather than give it up?"

"Yes, it is an awful wrench; but don't you imagine I should have any objection whatever to marry you. You are a nice, sensible girl, and I don't believe you'd bother me a bit. The generality of women *are* awful bores; but I always liked you, you know. Though you are soft as lamb's wool, I think you're a plucky one. It's the very

best way out of the hole; and we might be uncommonly jolly together. What do you think—eh?”

“And you rather liked me always?” asked Myra.

“Yes, I did. I took more notice of you than I did of the generality of women—I am not a lady’s man, you know.”

“I should think not. Tell me, would your liking have been strong enough to make you wish to marry me had I not turned out an heiress?”

“Well, no—of course not. I should never have thought of it—it wouldn’t have done. Unpleasant for the woman, too, in the unequal matches.”

“Then, Captain Forrester, you are by your own showing one of the flock of vultures, the fortune-hunters, against whom you warned me!”

“Deuced sharp of you! But I rather like it, I am sharp myself. Come, now! Let us come to the point; is it ‘Yes’ or ‘No’?”

“No! Captain Forrester,” with a pretty smile and shake of the head.

“No!” he repeated in incredulous astonishment. “Well, I must say I think you are hasty and ill-judged. Take a day or two to think over it. Just see how it would simplify matters; and I’m not a bad fellow, I can assure you. Wardlaw and Leyton would tell you the same! You should have your own way in your own department. Then the family diamonds aint bad, and we’d have ’em reset, so——”

“Captain Forrester,” interrupted Myra, now absolutely laughing, “I don’t want to marry a necklace and a pair of ear-rings! You mean well and kindly, but I never could marry anyone I didn’t love, and I do not think I could love you, though, no doubt, there are many who might.”

“Yes, yes, I know that!” said Forrester, much perplexed. “But you are the one I want. I should get awfully fond of you, I am sure I should; and it would be such a good arrangement.”

“No doubt it would; but as it is one which would not make *me* happy, why—pray put it out of your head, Captain Forrester.”

“By Jove! it’s very annoying that you will not see things in the same light I do. Do not be obstinate, it’s an awful fault in a woman, and they almost all have it. I will not

Consider your decision final; take a day or two to think of it. Ask Leyton's advice, I am sure he will advise you well."

"And what a pity, Captain Forrester, *you* do not see things in the same light I do. I shall not change my mind in a day or in a year."

"It's most astonishing!" exclaimed Forrester in frank surprise. "Well, I'm awfully sorry. I like the money and I like you. I don't want to rob you, and I can't bear refunding what I have taken, so——"

"Dear Captain Forrester!" cried Myra eagerly, "do you think I should be so mean and ungrateful as to be persuaded to ask for anything you have taken, believing it to be your own; *no* one shall induce me to that. For the rest, we can divide it, somehow, as equitably as possible."

"I think you are a regular brick!" said Forrester, much relieved.

"And, Captain Forrester, do not be angry with me. I should be so pleased if you will keep friends with me. I *do* like you, and you are such an unusual character!"

"Who? Me? Now that's a little too strong. Yes! of course we'll be friends; and, look here! It has just struck me; perhaps you're fond of some other fellow, some poor devil of a teacher without a sixpence. What a lucky beggar he'll be if you stick to him!"

"Yes!" returned Myra with laughing eyes and a lovely blush. "He is a teacher, and I intend to stick to him if he sticks to me."

"Why, of course he will *now*."

"I am not so sure! he seems a little uncertain."

"What an ass! You chuck him if he is inclined to play fast and loose."

"Oh! I shall not force him to marry me."

"Yes, you chuck him and take me!" Myra laughed and then suddenly grew grave. Was she not drawing down retribution on herself by thus playing on words, while she was by no means sure that Leyton was quite of the same mind as when he asked her to be his wife? She grew pale, too, which, for a wonder, Forrester noticed.

"You must be pretty well done," he exclaimed, "so I'll go. I've told them to send over strawberries and flowers and things, and there's a nice light, open carriage in the

coach-house; you shall have it every day; you must begin to go out now."

"Thank you very, very much!"

"All right; let me know when you want it."

"The doctor said I might go out to-morrow for a little while."

"Very well, you shall have it to-morrow at two!"

"That is the right time."

"Good-by for the present. If you should change your mind," shaking hands effusively, "just send me a line. I'll come directly."

Myra's first impulse when she was alone was to laugh heartily at the very prosaic proposal she had rejected, but the laugh soon died away. There was something ominous in the change of manner so evident in Jack Leyton. He was most kind, most devoted to her interests, but terribly composed and guarded. Had anything occurred to turn his affection—the affection he had so strongly expressed—into indifference? If so, what was fortune, health, success, to her? Nothing, and less than nothing without Leyton's love. But Jack was not variable, and she quickly came to the conclusion that the change was wrought by her sudden accession of fortune. He was poor and proud; and he hesitated to renew the offer which he pressed upon her when she had little and he was the better off of the two. This scruple, far-fetched and foolish as it seemed to her, might destroy the joy of her life. Yet how could she surmount it; must she see the hope which alone could beautify existence fading away without an effort to realize it? She could but wait and pray!

Forrester was as good as his word. The carriage appeared next day, and each day after, to Miss Letitia's satisfaction and glorification; then a note reached Myra from its owner, stating that the writer was going up to town, and giving his address in case she should want to write.

Still Leyton prolonged his absence; but he wrote frequently, and had at last, he said, seen a lady in whose house he thought Myra might be happy and comfortable. "I shall come down on Thursday, however, and tell you all about it. So glad to find you nearly yourself again."

CHAPTER XXIX.

BEHIND THE CLOUD IS THE SUN STILL SHINING.

THOUGH Myra was rapidly gaining strength, and was beginning to lose the alarmingly fragile look which had so much alarmed Leyton, she was still weak enough to be unhinged by the mingled fear and joy with which she anticipated a visit from him.

She did not think it likely he could arrive before three or four o'clock, and had countermanded the carriage in order to be at home at that hour.

How anxiously she had looked in the glass, and observed with pleasure that her cheeks were less hollow; that her eyes had the deeper color of renewed health. Above all, she thanked Heaven that her hair had been spared.

She was now able to read for herself, and, after her eleven o'clock cup of milk and biscuit, lay down on the sofa and tried to compose herself to attend to her book, when, to her surprise, the ancient Keziah opened the door and said:

"Mr. Leyton, miss. He's waiting downstairs, and wants to know if he may come up."

"Oh, yes—of course," cried Myra; starting up, and hardly able to see from the wild beating of her heart.

The next moment her hand was in his.

He was looking darker and more worn than when she saw him last; and though his eyes lit up at the sight of her, there was a gloomy expression in them.

"I *am* glad to see you so much more like your old self, Myra," he said, gazing into her eyes for a moment while he held her hand. "You have got on splendidly during my absence."

"Then you stayed away a long time," she returned, drawing a deep breath.

"I had plenty to do, I assure you; and I have heaps of news, which ought to make me welcome,"

Myra smiled a caressing smile.

"I am pleased with the solicitor Forrester's men recommended, and the sooner you can see him and hear his propositions the better. I think you might travel to town next week. Then I fancy we have found a suitable abode for you, with a lady—really a lady—who has a pretty little house near Regent's Park. She is the widow of a clergyman, and has two daughters—young things who are being educated. She will come down to be interviewed by you on Saturday, I believe."

"Thank you, Jack. What trouble you have taken for me!"

"It is no trouble, as you very well know; and, Myra, I have had a long talk with the rejected one. Forrester has been telling me his tale of woe."

"Has he? Oh! I wish you could have overheard his address, or addresses. You cannot imagine anything so funny. He was so amazed at my want of taste and judgment."

"He is a curious fellow, but not half bad."

"No; by no means. He is really very good to me, and likes me in his way. Remember, Jack, no one shall persuade me to take back that money he spent."

"No, I don't think anyone will; but, by Jove, we'll have those thousands out of Mrs. Dallas. If ever there was a schemer, it's that woman. By the way, I have a long complaint of her here from Lady Shirland"—taking a letter from his breast pocket. "She says,"—looking through and turning over a page—"ay, here it is:

"'I have had a wretched time since I came down here. First the weather was bad; then Mrs. Dallas arrived, and brought neither sunshine nor calm with her. She was quite full of this strange story about poor Captain Forrester's loss of fortune, and wore me out with explanations of how the certificates were found, and how high and noble her son's motives were in taking them to Forrester, until I quite made up my mind that she knew all about the whole thing, from the time she invited poor Miss Dallas to be her child by adoption and grace—adoption and caste would be nearer the mark. She is an *intriguante* of the first water, and I am amazed how Dorothea could ever have been imposed upon by her.'

"Lady Shirland never was taken in in her life, you will observe," interposed Leyton.

"As to Dorothea, she has nearly driven me wild. Nothing would do but to have that handsome young ducky, Ashby, down here. He came very quick, and then the nonsense she went on with made me quite ill. You know I am very patient, but I *did* lose my temper at last, and said a few sharp things. Then, if you please, there were hysterics, and faintings, and nerves, and Heaven knows what. Finally, she threw herself into that woman Dallas's arms, and begged to be rescued from the tyranny of that cruel step-mother. What do you think of that? And two days after, the precious trio set out for Hamburg. An hour before they started she and Ashby presented themselves, and informed me they were engaged, and would be married in about two months, on their return from Hamburg. All I can say is, "I don't care." On the whole, I am sorry for Ashby. He little knows what he is bringing on himself. Society need not blame *me*—I have done my duty. As for me, I am utterly worn out. As soon as I am a little calmer I shall come up to town on my way somewhere. Be sure you call, my dear boy. I want to hear all about you and your affairs. They ought——"

Here Leyton broke off abruptly.

"There is nothing more worth reading," he said. "You see, Mrs. Dallas has settled her beloved son at last. It was a grand winding up."

"Oh, Jack, I am sorry for poor Miss Browne. I am very much afraid Lionel will be unkind and cruel. There is something in Lionel I always shrink from."

"I do not think you need fear for the lovely Dorothea—she is deuced shrewd. She'll have her money tied up, you'll see; and then she'll have the whip-hand of that romantic youth, her *fiancé*."

"I hope so, I'm sure."

There was a pause, broken by Leyton.

"And you feel almost yourself again?" he said, looking at her with the pained, yearning expression in his eyes which stirred her heart whenever she observed it.

"Nearly—not quite. I get dreadfully tired toward the end of the day, and I am stupidly nervous. The idea of meeting this lady who is coming to see me on Satur-

day makes my heart beat. Can you stay to be with me?"

"I am afraid I cannot; indeed, it would be better to have a *tête-à-tête*—you would understand each other better unhampered by the presence of a third person, who is proverbially in the way."

"Perhaps so," reluctantly.

"I was annoyed with Forrester," resumed Leyton, "for worrying you when you were not equal to the agitation."

"He did not agitate me a bit. I do not care for him, and he does not care for me. It was simply a discussion of ways and means. It amused me. But he has been very nice. I do hope we may keep friends."

"There is no reason why you should not."

Another pause.

"Are you working now, Jack?" asked Myra timidly.

She was beginning to feel ill at ease with him because of a certain constraint in his manner.

"No; I don't seem to have any power of work—any ideas left in me. And you? I suppose our Paris scheme will fall through now. The heiress of old George Dallas need not daub her pretty fingers with paint."

"If I do not work, Jack, what am I to do? You forget that I have few friends and no kindred. I am alone—I must make some plan of life for myself."

"My dear Myra, friends will flock round you *now* by the hundred."

Myra only shook her head.

"I am afraid I must leave you for the present," resumed Leyton. "I have a commission from Forrester to see to the rearrangement of some pictures, and as I must return to town to-morrow——"

"Oh, no, no!" interrupted Myra, growing very white and clasping her hands, "not so soon. I have so much to say to you, I——"

Leyton rose from his chair and went across to the window before he spoke, then he said rather coldly:

"Of course I shall stay if you want me."

"I have wished to ask you one question. You will answer truly, I know; you are always true."

"What is it?" said Leyton, looking a little surprised.

"When—when you asked me to be your wife"—the

color rose quickly in her cheek—"did you know all about me? I don't mean this latter prosperous part of my story, but the old, unhappy time, when no one thought I had a right to any—name."

"Don't distress yourself," replied Leyton, in a low tone. "I knew it all, Myra, but, of course, it did not affect me."

"It affected me very much," said Myra, her fringed lids drooping over her eyes. "Mrs. Dallas said that no gentleman would think of marrying so unfortunate a creature as I was. I thought you did *not* know—that you asked me in ignorance; and that was the reason I said 'No,' Jack."

Leyton was silent for an instant; then he took her hand and kissed it.

"I understand your intention, dear," he said, "but you made me very miserable. You are so good and tender"—here he let her hand go—"that you might have mistaken gratitude for the little help I have been able to give you for the love of which you know perhaps nothing. Now things are so greatly changed that I should not act like a man of honor were I to ask you to engage yourself to an unlucky devil of an artist—a man who has thrown away his life and his chances so far. You are young—even younger than your years; you have seen nothing of the world; you have scarcely spoken to a man except Ashby and myself. You ought to see what others are like. When you mix in society you will find a dozen suitors—among them, no doubt, a good fellow or two who might love you as you deserve to be loved. Do not tempt me to be false to the trust you put in me, Myra."

"No matter who may love me in future," murmured Myra, who had risen and stood leaning one hand and her head against the high mantelshelf, "you are the one that would have taken me from my low estate—who would have given me your name and your life, and——" She stopped.

"And who would have been most richly rewarded had you but consented," said Leyton, almost in a whisper.

"Listen to me, Jack," she returned, clasping her hands and letting them drop in front of her, "it may sound very bold, but I must say it. You may be as long as you like making up your mind about what is right or wrong; you may show me all the elegant young or old men in London,

but I never will marry anyone but you, Jack. I could not bear it."

"What!" cried Leyton, his eyes aglow with delight and exultation; "do you care for me so much? Do you mean all you say?"

"Are you not linked with all I loved in the past? Have you not been the one—the only one—who felt for me and would have sheltered me in the present?"

She stretched out her hands to him with infinite tenderness and grace, her blue eyes full of tears.

"This is more than a stoic could stand," cried Leyton. "Away with every consideration but the heaven you offer!" He drew her to him in a close embrace, kissing her brow, her eyes, her sweet, tremulous lips, where his own clung fondly till she drew back, startled by the passion she had evoked.

"My darling, you are trembling; you can hardly stand. I ought not to have lost of the reins of my self-control. But you are my own; nothing can part us now. You have given yourself to me freely."

"If you will have me," returned Myra; and hiding her face against his shoulder, a burst of tears relieved her.

What a delicious discussion ensued! What they should do; what they should say; how they should date their engagement from Leyton's first proposal, now nearly two months ago; how they should hurry up the lawyers, and (urged by Leyton) marry as soon as possible; that Myra should have a home of her own to go to, where (suggested by her) they would have the loveliest of studios, and work with infinite diligence, etc., etc.

The most unimaginative reader can foresee the rest: how matters were happily arranged between Forrester and Myra, easily done when one party was just and the other generous; how Lady Shirland insisted on Myra's wedding taking place at her house; how Forrester gave the bride away, and remained her fast friend ever after; how Dorothea married Lionel and kept his nose to the grindstone; and Mrs. Dallas was so impoverished by her restoration of Myra's poor little portion that she was obliged to live in a pretty apartment near the Arc de Triomphe and give musical afternoons instead of dinners, where, nevertheless, people were very glad to go, as everyone met everyone they wished to

know. How Mrs. Keene flourished and often visited her dear "misse," and the excellent Foleys kept on the even tenor of their course; how, in short, everything was wound up according to the laws of that high court of poetical justice which governs the ending of books rather than by the grim regulations of reality.

Yet who that has traveled much and far on the dusty, thorny ways of life can doubt that among the struggling mass of competitive humanity there are good hearts and true, to leaven the whole lump—souls that rise above selfishness; and strong, tender beings who will bare their backs to the lash if thereby they can save the weaker ones they love? "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

THE END.





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